ALL-FELLOWS AND THE CLOAK OF FRIENDSHIP

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

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All Fellows, and
The Cloak of Friendship

DEDICATION

O MOVING FRIENDS, that unrevealed, THROUGH dusk or dark, or break of day, x x BRING seed, to bless the common field, WHERE the worn ploughshare lifts the clay:
WHO STAND as shadows, of a light MORE fair than man has wit to see, COME from your homes of day & night, AND lay the covering cloak on me!
AND IN THAT SHELTER let me share THE gifts of time which yet remain, YE, that gave warmth, and light, and air, AND sought no recompence again.
SO SHALL THE FRIENDS I have not wronged TAKE root within my life and grow: THIS dust of life where once belonged THE HEARTS I sought to know.

L.H.

ALL-FELLOWS AND THE CLOAK OF FRIENDSHIP

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Contents

The Truce of God

AMONG the beasts of the forest word went that a holy man was come to live in their midst : at the base of a rock, which would give him shelter from the noonday's heat, he had wattled himself a shed. Out of the undergrowth the animals watched him by day, and saw him digging himself a well, or searching the earth for roots ; and at night, when he slept, they came through the door of his shed and snuffed at him where he lay. Then they said : " He is at peace with us, for there is no smell of blood on him. Let him be ! " And after the herds and the timid kinds, that love to be at peace with man, came the lion and the other beasts of prey ; and they looked and said : " He is no hunter, but a lover of peace." Therefore they let him be.

Soon the hermit, looking quietly out from his hut, saw that none of the beasts had any fear of him at all ; but that to each kind he was become as one of themselves. Their eyes put off the startled look that comes at the sight of man ; and, instead of dread, the hermit began to read in them the joys and sorrows that underlay all the life of the forest. In a little while the furry passers-by came not only to know him by sight, but to be friends.

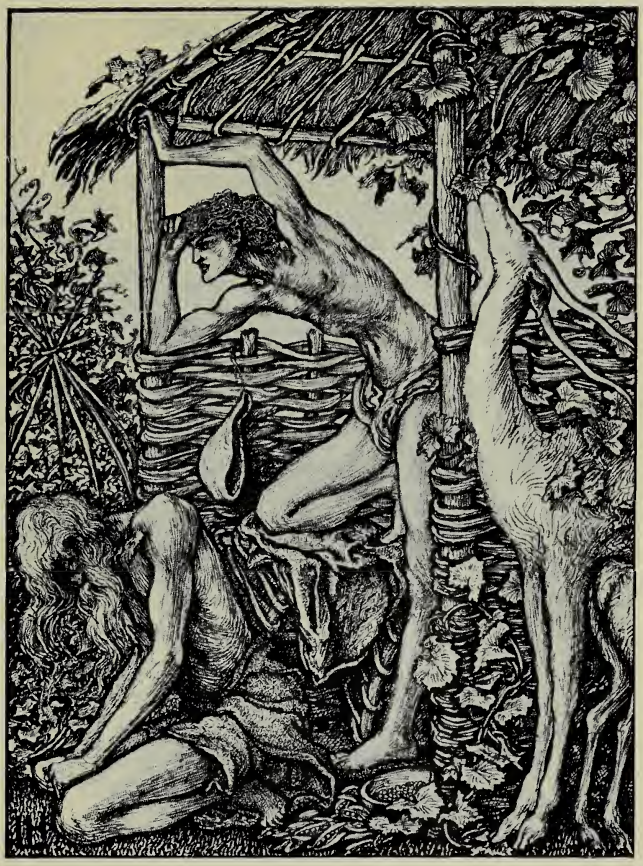
When the heat of the sun lay heavy upon the forest, and all the air was like a furnace in the sick drought of noon, then the shadow under the rock by the wattled hut was the coolest place to lie in :

and the hinds would come with their young ones, and the black wild boars, and the little coneys, and all lie quietly together round the hermit as he prayed. There, too, a buck that was lame, and could not get down to the drinking-place, came and begged water out of the hermit's well ; and always whatever he met looked him in the eyes, and was friendly.

The beasts that fought together at pairing time came to him with their wounds ; and mothers brought their sick young, and laid them at his feet. And the hermit found that to him God had given healing power over all the life in the forest. His peaceful feet, whose sound all the animals knew too well to fear, led him to sights that are not given to other men : he saw fierce beasts gentle at their wooing, and jackals tender over their young ; and the more he saw, the more he loved God and all the orders that He had made.

Yet not only on joy did his heart grow wise, but on sorrow. Hinds came and wept to him for their bucks killed at the drinking-place by the beasts of blood : and he beheld how famine and sudden ravages of disease swept over the forest and struck down the herds in scores. And disease, indeed, his healing touch could help to drive away, but not famine. Yet God ever granted much to his prayers.

Once, at the time when the young deer were yet helpless and dependent upon their mothers for food, a hind fell from the edge of the rock



THE TRUCE OF GOD

under which the hermit had built his hut, and had her neck broken in the fall. Her little ones, who had been following her where she went, crept down, and found her dead body lying, and cried pitifully, knowing that now they must die also, being without food. Then the hermit gathered them in his arms, and prayed to God for them that their lives might be spared. All night he prayed ; and about dawn the hind lifted her head and bleated the feeding-call to her young.

But not long afterwards, when her little ones were strong and able to go alone, the hind came back to the hermit, and lay down with her head between his knees, and so died.

Now after the hermit had lived many years in the forest, there came to him one day a lion carrying a young child in its mouth. And the child, for all that the brute held him in its teeth, was not wounded or afraid. The hermit, being sure that what came in such strange wise must have been sent to him by God's will, took the child to be to him as his own son. Out of the forest he called a hind to suckle it ; and the child throve and grew.

Soon, when its limbs were grown big and strong, the child began to learn from the hermit all the gentle parts of speech that were needed between them in that lonely place : and, as time went on, the love between them was wonderful. The hermit taught him of peace and salvation, and of the love of God ; but the child looked at the stars

and the trees, and listened to the wind and the cries of beasts : nothing else did he seem to understand. He went and played with the young roes and hinds, and crept into the dark lairs of beasts ; and, for love of the hermit, nothing in all the forest would do him harm.

Living the wild open life, the boy grew in strength ; but more and more the restlessness of unknown desires took hold of him. He stretched out his big limbs, and sighed because he was so strong ; and then he would go to his foster-father, and ask about the earth and the ways of men, and hear only of the love of God, and of gentleness and peace.

One day he put his arm round the neck of his foster-hind, and went down with her to the drinking-place ; and just as they were coming there with the rest of the deer, that part of the herd which was before them turned and fled, as there fell by the water's edge a young buck pulled down by some beast of prey.

When the boy went back, and asked his father the meaning of the blood and the hind's terror, the hermit told him that it was but nature, and as God willed, who had made each animal to live after its own kind. Again the youth looked at himself with his great growth of arms, and sighed. After that, whenever his foster-mother went down to drink, he went also, putting his arm across her like a yoke, for he knew that nothing in the forest would do harm to him. And presently, partly

in malice, but partly in tenderness of heart, one by one he brought all the roes and hinds down with him to drink, covering them with the shelter of his arm that they might not be hurt.

In a little while the lions were half-famished, and complaining for lack of food ; and the hermit began to have knowledge of his son's ways with the hinds down at the drinking-place. He said to the youth : " My son, you do not well : you must leave all the beasts to go their own way, as God has made it good for them ! Doubt not that nothing falls without it be His will."

Then the youth went no more with the hinds to the drinking-place ; but he sighed, looking at his long arms, and stretching them out : for he came of a hunter's breed.

Now time went on, and he grew near to being a man ; and more and more his foster-father loved him as the apple of his own eye, yet little could he teach him of the love of God. And the youth roamed far and wide through the forest, restless with strength and the fire of manhood, yet finding no use for the quick coursings of his blood.

One day, as he strayed into far-off parts that bordered the ways of men, he came upon a party of hunters, and, watching them, saw the bow drawn, and heard the arrow sing to its prey. Then he laughed loud at that, finding the nature which from his birth God had given him. A month later he came back to his father's hut with the prowess and the spoils of a hunter.

Then there was fear through all that part of the forest, where no hunter had ever yet come ; for the youth had brought with him the smell of blood shed by man. The hermit was shaken by doubt, and troubled with a divided mind.

" Lay down, my son," he said, " your arrows and your bow ; for you bring tribulation instead of peace to the place that has reared you ! "

" Nay, father," answered the youth, " for this is the nature which God has given me. Give me leave, therefore, to go hence, and now and again I will return to you, when the home-feeling grows on me ; but here I will not trouble you."

So the hermit let him go, and the youth promised that when a day came he would return. On his forthgoing he went down toward the drinking-place, and there he saw coming along the track the hind that had been his foster-mother, and whom he still loved. But when she saw him she sprang away startled down to the water, because of the smell of blood that was on him ; and there, just when she reached the pool's edge, out sprang a lion, and with his paw struck her across the spine so that it was broken, and she fell dead without a cry. But the great brute scenting danger sprang back into cover of the forest, and the youth's arrow sang after him at a venture, striking him behind the loin and wounding him sorely.

To the hermit's cell early on the morrow came the lion dragging a lamed limb, with an arrow sticking in the wound, and the hermit drew out

the arrow, and with his weeping salved the wound and healed it, making the limb whole and strong. But the days of his peace were over : love for his son, and love for the lower kinds could not strive in his heart, so fast the love of his son came uppermost. And no thought could he have of blame for him : " Seeing," he said, " that it is the nature God has given him, therefore I should do wrong to bind him."

So between himself and the beasts there began to be shadows of doubt, and they came to him no more without fear or hindrance, but stood at a distance, seeming to say with timid eyes, " Is the son you love, who sheds our blood, with you, or are you alone ? " And ever more and more, as time went on, his heart yearned toward the absent youth, who was dearer to him than his own life, and who yet did not return.

Till it happened one day again, as before, that the lion came, dragging its body, and grievously maimed, to be healed by the hermit's hands. Then at the sight his heart leapt, for he said within himself, " My son is here again, very soon I shall see him ! " Therefore gladly and in pity he healed the beast of its wound.

But when all was done, and the limb made whole, lo, the beast bowed down and licked his feet, weeping as never beast wept before, and could make no end of showing thanks and sorrow, until, with his blessing, it turned about and went.

Then, it being the heat of the day, the hermit

lay down and slept till evening ; and when he woke, there at his feet the lion crouched, watching him, and weeping. And when it saw his eyes open, it turned and sprang away into the forest.

The hermit rose, and looked out, and there at his feet in the twilight lay the body of his son, dead, with his bow yet in his hand, and his arrows in their sheath. Looking, he saw the marks of claws and of teeth, and knew by what death his son had been taken from him. And at that knowledge all his mild heart became charged with grief and passion and rage, and the lust for revenge made him mad.

He stooped and kissed the dead lips ; and out of the hand he took the bow, and the sheath full of arrows, and he went down to the drinking-place and waited there, that he might have vengeance of his son's death. " Nay," he cried in his heart, " for I did evil and not good, in that I healed twice the beast of blood that my son would have slain."

He waited till past midnight ; and one by one all the forest kinds had come down and drunk of the water ; but still his enemy had not come.

Presently, in the solitude and silence, he heard the sound of a beast coming down to the water to drink ; then he made ready an arrow, and pointed it toward the track.

Down the way from under the trees came the great lion of the forest ; and by his side walked the hermit's son, with his arm thrown over the

beast's neck like a yoke. All his body shone with a soft light, and thereon were the wounds left by the lion's teeth and claws ; and he went down, carrying his bow and arrows, like a mighty hunter before the Lord.

The hermit saw how the two went down into the water together ; but when, having drunk, the beast turned and sprang up the bank, the vision was gone.

Then the hermit let fall both bow and arrows, and went back eased of all grief, and kissed his son's face where he lay dead before the door of the little hut ; and there he buried him deep down, in the fear and love of God, knowing that above all fear the love of God endured. And on the morrow, all the animals that went that way came near for him to lay his hands upon their heads in blessing, and to call them his friends.

The Cloak of Friendship

THERE was once upon a time a king of Finland who had two sons ; and when he came to die he did not know which of them it were best to leave his crown to, for though one was the elder, the other might be the fitter ; and in that country the king alone had the right to say who should be king after him.

So as he lay dying, he bethought him of a way to prove them. Then he called his sons to him and said : " In a short while I shall be gone, and one of you must be king after me ; which is it to be ? " His sons remained in respectful silence, waiting on what they perceived he had yet to say to them ; and, after observing them for a time thoughtfully, the king went on :

" Though you are equally dear to me as sons, yet I may not divide the kingdom between you to weaken it ; how then shall I know which of you will make the better ruler when I am gone ? This is what I will do. I will show you all my secret treasures, and let each of you choose one of them : and the one that makes the best choice shall be king after me."

So the king led his sons into his treasury, and there showed them all his wealth and means of government ; and especially he showed them the three chief treasures by which he maintained the strength and peace and security of his realm. The first was the Sword of Sharpness, whose property

was to slay the king's enemies ; there was no man so strong that he might stand against it. "It has won me my wars," said the king.

The second was the Cap of Darkness, whose property was to make the wearer of it invisible : by means thereof the king might go to and fro unperceived of any man, and search out those that were in secret his enemies or plotters against the welfare of the state. "It has brought me to old age," said the king.

The third was the Cloak of Friendship. "It has brought me friends," said the king : "but its properties can only be learned by him who wears it ; moreover, it is yet in the making, and secures not all friendships, else would there be no wars and no plotters against the good estate of the realm. Now I have shown you my treasures, and it is for you to make choice."

Then the elder son spoke quick, saying : "The Sword of Sharpness ! for with that, while I have life, I shall be strong and feared, being secure of victory." And he looked sharply at his younger brother, to whom also "Make choice" said the king.

Then said the younger son : "My brother's choice deprives me of nothing that I wish for. Let the sword be his, and the crown with it. I choose the Cloak of Friendship."

The king said : "Your choice is the better one. After my death you shall be king."

So when the king died, his younger son, though still a child, was set upon the throne, while the

elder, with the Sword of Sharpness, went to offer his services wherever war was, and to win fame ; and great news of him came from all the countries around, while the young king sat in peace at home, with the Cloak of Friendship for his possession.

Now this cloak, of which the old king had told that it was yet a-making but not made, was fashioned in this wise : of every kind of animal in the world it contained one hair, and of every kind of bird under heaven it contained one feather ; but it contained not the hair of a man. For whatever gave hair or feather to the weaving of that cloak must give life also, and freely, knowing the cost beforehand. Therefore was the cloak woven from the covering of all living kinds under heaven, saving of man ; for no man would give his life freely to let one hair of his head carry with it the virtue of self-sacrifice to the weaving of the Cloak of Friendship.

Now when the old king gave the cloak to his son, he told him also its story : how a great wizard, learned in the speech of all living creatures upon earth, had in the making of it spent a long life-time. For going first to one and then to another of the tribes of feather and fur, he had said to each : " Find out one of you willing to die that he may have part in the Cloak of Friendship." Then they asked him : " What is this cloak, that we should die to have part in it ? " And the wizard told them : " It is a cloak that will bring those that have share in it to be in friendship and

understanding with man." And when they heard that, out of every tribe one was found ready to give up life for that friendship and understanding between them and man which had been lost since Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden.

So the cloak came into making, but was not yet made, because as yet no man had been found to give up his life that through him with mankind the bond of friendship might be made whole. Even the wizard when he was dying would not give up one day of his life that its work might become accomplished. So had it been with the old king : " The less we have of life, little son," said he, " the more we cling to it. Thou art full of life, but do not die yet." And so saying he had laid upon the boy's shoulders the unfinished Cloak of Friendship.

The young king wearing the cloak felt the motions of its virtue within him, and had a friendly eye for all living things ; and of the lower kinds nothing feared him ; he understood their speech and they his, nor were any of their ways strange to him. He knew why the starlings flock and are off again as at a word, and why the wild geese make always the same shape together in flight, and why the dog turns three times in his kennel before he lies down, and why the fallow deer wags his tail before he lifts up his head from grass ; and many things we have not the wits to see and hear that are common to all life, he saw and heard.

Thus he knew that on Christmas night, when

the ox and the ass are talking in stall, there are others out and seeking to get word, while the Divine rumour runs between the earth and the stars, and to learn what the joy means of which the ox and the ass already know a little. But he knew also that it was well not to tell too much, else might the kind hearts of dumb things break with impatience for the relief which is surely one day to come, and with wonder at the hardness of men's hearts.

One Christmas night it was dark, though the ground was covered with snow; and the little king put on his cloak of feather and fur, and stole out to the fields. And all round him in the air he felt the rumour of the Divine Birth moving to give rest to the hearts of men. Going where the track grew lost on the open down, he met a lame hare limping heavily over the snow.

"Grey hare, grey hare, where are you going so fast?" cried the young king.

And the hare answered: "Whither I go I know not, but danger is behind, and being lame I cannot go fast; yet it seemed to me that I should find shelter this night."

Then the king threw open his cloak, and let it blow wide about his feet. "Come under the Cloak of Friendship," he said, "and you shall be safe."

And the hare limped under the hem of the king's cloak, and cried: "There are multitudes of us here, yet I see none!"

"Wait and see!" said the king. So they went on.

Presently came a ferret running low on the scent

of its prey. "Whither away, ferret?" said the king.

"To my supper," answered the ferret, "for I am cold and supperless, and to-night I smell good food ahead if I can only get to it."

"Turn in here," said the king, "and you shall have supper presently." And spreading his cloak wider, he let the ferret come under it.

"Good even to you, brother!" said the ferret, seeing the hare running close with him at the king's heels; and "Good even, brother!" said the hare. So together the three went on.

A little further and they met a fox; his thick tail brushed the snow as his feet sank in. "Red fox, red fox, where are you going to-night?" asked the king.

"Over the hill to the next farm," answered the fox. "There, under a rick, sleep three white geese, and I mean to have one of them, for to-night the farmer's dog has gone to a christening."

"What christening is that?" asked the king.

"Nay, I know not," answered the fox, "but I heard him to-day telling the shepherd's dog that to-night there was meat and a warm bed for them both, because of that christening feast. Thus I too profit," said the fox.

"Come under the Cloak of Friendship," said the king, "and you shall fare better than you think."

So the fox ran in alongside of the ferret and the hare, and they exchanged greetings all, and together went on.

"Here be three courses at least," said the fox, sniffing prophetic.

" And three mouths for the same," said the hare, quite as hungry as the rest.

Presently as they went further they met a wolf. " Wolf, wolf," said the king, " where are you going this night ? "

" Over the hill, beyond the farm, to the fold," answered the wolf. " A good fat lamb is waiting for me there ; and the shepherds will not see me to-night, for with good cheer and song they keep watch carelessly."

" Come under my cloak," said the king, " and you shall sup better with me."

So the wolf went in along with the others under the cloak, and " Merry company," cried he, seeing them all there, " luck be with us ! " So they went on, and whatever they met by the way the king gathered under the Cloak of Friendship and led them on toward the farm. " For," thought he, " since I have saved the farmer a lamb and a goose, he may well feed us ! "

There with his friendly rabble he knocked at the door. Out ran the farmer's dog and the sheep-dog, barking ; but the king had but to call them once, and they too came to heel like the rest.

" God shield us ! " cried the farmer, all agape as he beheld the wolf and the fox and the ferret with all the other beasts crowding behind. " What Noah's ark is this that is being loosed upon us now ? "

" God be with you," said the young king.

" Amen ! " said the farmer ; " but for that get you gone ! "

"Nay, we are hungry," said the king, "and to-night is peace on earth. Do not send all these away empty."

"Why should *I* feed them?" cried the farmer. "They steal food of me often enough; but to-night they bring their own meal with them: let them but look right and left! And as for you—— let go my dogs; you are a wizard, I say. Out, out, else we will try fire on you!" And while some of those within caught up pitchforks, others drew out brands from the hearth and came running to the door to drive off such unwelcome applicants.

The king drew back from the threshold and let the door be closed. "Alas! little ones," said he to his friends, "I promised you food and warmth: yet now we must go further before we find it. Are you too cold or too hungry to come?"

"Nay, master," said the fox, "for under this cloak of yours I smell good meats ahead. We will yet come with you." And all the others said the same.

So the king turned back toward the city, and brought them all under the Cloak of Friendship right up to the doors of the palace. Great was the astonishment of all there when they saw those strange guests. And the king ordered food and drink in abundance to be set before them: so they ate till they were filled; and after that the king sent them back in peace to their own homes, promising in a year's time the same welcome to all who would come.

On the morrow he noticed that people looked at him strangely ; they crooked their thumbs behind their backs whenever his eye rested on them, and seemed fearful of coming near him. For, because of his strange guests of the night before, all thought him a wizard, a dealer in black magic, even as the farmer had done. Then had he bethought him of the Cap of Darkness which lay still in the king's treasury, he could have learned much of what was plotted behind his back ; but his heart was full of friendship for all men, and he thought not of such means for guarding himself from danger.

So it was with joy that he heard soon after how his brother was returning from all the wars that he had been waging in other countries, to visit once more the realm of which he would have been king, had not his brother's preferment ousted him.

" Ah, brother ! " cried the young king, going out to welcome him, " sheath your sword for a while, and live in peace with me ; you have made wars too many, and stayed too long away from home."

The other answered him coldly : " Brother, long ago your choice of peace seemed good to our father, when he made you to be king : but my choice of the sword seems good to me now. Strange friendship you seem to have made ; but your crown you must give up to me."

" Alas ! brother," said the king, " has all your fame left you room to be jealous of me and my office ? Yet it may well be that for a year you

may wish to taste rule over a peaceful kingdom. So, if you will, take mine ; but let me keep still this Cloak of Friendship which our father's own hands put on me before he died."

" You may keep it," said his brother ; " but go not with it into strange places, nor do any more of the strange things you have done. Take heed, and let my word to you be law ! "

So the elder brother took up the crown and ruled ; and the other with little ado let it go, and went his own way peacefully, coming and going with little notice from men. And of all his kingly appurtenances the Cloak of Friendship was now the only one that was left to him. That kept his heart warm, and gave employment to his mind during the year that followed his deposition. But often he would look at the frayed edge where it lacked finish because no man would give his life that the bond of friendship between man and beast might be made whole, and would wonder if ever it could be right for a man with a soul that lives to give up life for the sake of the beasts that perish.

So the year went round, and by no sign did the dethroned king show envy of the brother who had usurped his place ; but often, beholding him, his heart grew sorrowful, for the Sword of Sharpness would not stay sheathed, and the land had no longer its former rest ; and " Alas ! brother," cried younger to elder, " now you make great wars : but when Christmas comes I will show you peace."

"What is peace?" inquired the other, scornfully.

"It is the Cloak of Friendship," he answered.

Now when Christmas was near, it was told to the elder brother how in his own house the younger was preparing a great feast without tables; and the tale of the Christmas before was revived. When the king heard of it, "Make no hindrance," said he, "but at the last bring me word, and my brother shall know which of us rules now and gives law."

On Christmas night, as soon as it was dark, the younger put on the Cloak of Friendship and set out to find his friends. And on the hillside he met them coming, for they all remembered his word to them, and with them they brought others, so that the ground was quick under them, and the snow dark with the trampling of their feet. To him came red deer and wild boar, fox and wolf, marten and stoat, polecat and badger, and with them also came the gentler and more timid kinds; and in greeting to them he said: "Peace be with you!" and spread the Cloak of Friendship wide that all might come under. So host and guests together turned and went back to the city. "This night," he said to them, "is the night of peace: fear no man!"

"What is peace?" asked the fox. "We know little thereof."

"It is the Cloak of Friendship," answered the young king. "Once it was so wide that it covered the whole world; but now it is shorn in pieces

and shredded with age and rough usage, and only here and there can one find it. Nevertheless on this night, many years ago, He that wore it whole was born. So in memory of Him there is peace to-night through nature wherever goes understanding of Him. Come under the Cloak of Friendship with me, and you shall be filled."

Not long afterwards word was brought to the elder brother in his palace that wizardry was at work once more, and that the ways of the city swarmed with wild beasts, all going peaceably toward the feast that had been prepared without tables. "Let the city gates be shut," said the king, "and wait you for my word."

And straight upon on that entered to him his brother, who kneeled to him and said: "Fair brother, to-night is the night of Christ's Birth. Come with me, and I will show you peace."

"Nay, brother," answered the king coldly. "I have heard tell already of this brave hunting-ground that you have prepared. So now, come with me and I will show you sport."

Quick with sudden fear the younger cried: "Brother, you will not kill?"

"As I choose," answered the other.

"Nay, for my honour is pledged to them! I have promised that they shall get no hurt."

"Make good thy promise!" said his brother, laughing; and, without more ado, he gave orders for the archers and the huntsmen with their hounds to make ready.

"Nay, nay, brother!" cried the other, distraught, "for if one of them is harmed I am dishonoured for ever."

"Thy dishonour is in making promises thou canst not perform," replied the king.

Whereat the other, speaking low and all heavy of heart, answered: "Nay, brother, for what I promised that I will perform. Yet, since thus we must part, first give me the kiss of peace that afterwards it may be known that there was love and not hate between us upon this night which is the joy of all Christian souls."

Then he took up the unfinished and frayed edge of the Cloak of Friendship, and wove therein one hair of a man's head, even his own; and he stretched it wide, and drew it about his brother's shoulder, so that the same cloak enfolded both. And so standing in bond to his brother he saw his face change and grow merciful, and knew that the gift had been granted, so that he need fear no longer for the lives of the guests he had brought in with him for that night.

So he kissed him and said: "Fair brother, is it not peace?"

"Nay, what is peace?" cried the elder brother in sudden fear, beholding him so pale; and catching him in his arms he felt his flesh cold as a dead man's.

"It is the Cloak of Friendship," answered the young king; and straightway he kissed death, and his heart stopped from its work, having come to a good end.

The King's Evil

ON the night which went before His death, we know how Christ gave to His disciples an example of humility, that even to this day is followed by the kings of certain countries. This is the washing of men's feet, however lowly and poor they may be, done on Maundy Thursday, by which earthly kings exalt themselves in striving to the pattern of their Lord's great humility.

Now, in a country where they did this, many generations ago, it had chanced that the King being an ill ruler, and false to his crown-oaths, had been driven out and supplanted by his brother who, if no better at heart than his predecessor, used his means of power more prudently. Thus it came about that, of the two brothers, one was a beggar with no friend to succour him, and the other lord of a great city, and of all the country lying for many leagues around it; and which one hated the other most, he who was supplanted or he who had done the supplanting, it were hard to say.

On the year following this turn-over of their fortunes, it being the morning of Maundy Thursday, the new King entered the palace-courtyard like a servant, girdled with a towel, and carrying a golden ewer in his hands. There, all about the walls, sat the beggars waiting for the King's service; and the King knelt down before each, as the custom was, and poured out water into a gold dish, and washed the feet of all.

And when he came to the last beggar of all, he found that it was his own brother, whom he hated more than aught else in the world, who had brought his feet there to be washed.

Wit ye well, the Devil was at that christening, though not a word did the brothers speak. And the King washed right foot and left foot, and dried them with all care, as if to say, "See, you are to me even as these, mere beggars, for whom custom makes me do this thing."

Now this that happened once, happened again each year, on Maundy Thursday, at the washing of the feet: there, last of all, sat the King dethroned, and the brother who had supplanted him came and knelt, and washed his feet as he had done for all the other beggars. And to the one it was the sweetest moment of all the year, and to the other the bitterest.

To the Devil also it became a red-letter feast-day, to cheer him through the dolorous time of Easter, so great was the joy wrought for him by the hatred of the two brothers.

After some years of keeping this bitter anniversary, supplanter and supplanted disappeared from the eyes of men on one and the same day, and went the way their hearts took them. The Devil made them to be his footstool, one under his right foot and one under his left, for he would not have their hatred die for lack of remembrance.

Presently, as time went on, the Devil looked up and laughed. "Out yonder," he said, "your feast-

THE KING'S EVIL

day on earth is beginning. Come, and we will see how the little King keeps the custom that his father and uncle kept so well ! "

The Devil clapped a soul into the cleft of each hoof, and went up to earth, like a diver who swims up to the surface of the deep sea.

The young King came down into the palace-courtyard, girdled with a napkin and carrying a golden ewer in his hands. His face was made holy by awe and love, because it was his first time of performing the solemn rite which had its pattern in the humility and love of Christ.

All round the walls sat the beggars with bare feet, and the Devil sat last of them : where hatred had sat all those years before, there he crouched with feet and face folded in the brown robe of a mendicant, and waited for the washing to come to his turn.

The King was little more than a child, and to him this old worn-out custom was the newest and strangest thing he had ever had to do with, more strange than the touching for the " King's evil," which was done on all feast-days. He thought of the disciples in the supper-room, on the night before the Passion ; and as he went from beggar to beggar he had in mind Christ with His friends the Saints : so, in each one of the beggars, he washed as it were the feet of some Saint.

" This," he said of the first, " must be Peter ! " for he was a true child of the Church, and he knew that Peter must ever come foremost. So he washed Peter's feet diligently and humbly, making mental

submission to all the dogmas which from then to this had infallibly come from him. Then he passed on. "And this shall be John!" he thought, at the next, for that saint was ever the one he loved the best. Then he came to James, and then Andrew: and so he went on till he had washed all the feet down to Thomas: then there was one left. "This must be Judas," he sighed, as he knelt down to offer water to the last.

The Devil untucked his robe, and let down his two hoofs into the gold dish. The young King drew back his breath, first in disgust, and then in pure pity, at sight of those deformed feet: and he thought of Judas, and the fiery way his feet had trodden at the last. And he thought, "To all the others I have prayed; but for this one may I pray?"

Then he laved the right foot tenderly, and the left foot tenderly, and dried them both: and at the end "Oh, God," he said, "make these lame feet whole!" And saying this he stooped forward and kissed them.

The Devil uttered a cry: for the two souls, which he had brought back with him out of Hell, had slipped from his hold, and had passed up into the lowest room of Purgatory.

The Devil drew up his feet painfully, and wrapped them in his robe, while with the best will in the world he let his curse go out on the mortal who had so robbed him. And the young King's lips were all blistered, as he rose up from that washing a white leper.

When the people saw what had befallen, they made sure that it was from God, a sign of His judgment on an evil house in its last generation. Therefore they made haste, and stripped the King of his royal robes, and drove him out beyond the city-walls to a leper's life among the solitary and waste places ; and in his room they appointed a magistracy to rule over them, for of the royal house no male of the direct line was left.

The leper King bore all meekly, knowing that his leprosy was but a symbol of the sins of himself and of his father's house : so putting on sackcloth he went out to live in a lonely hut far from the high-road, and not near any of the farms or tilled fields. In a path that ran hard by up to the hill-pastures, he put an earthen bowl, wherein sometimes food for him was set by the charitable, and sometimes not, as might chance. And never did any man see his face.

Only on one day in the seven must he come back to the place where before he had been King ; that was when all the bells rang, and at the great church in the city Mass was sung. Then he would cover his face over with a cloth, and hang the leper's bell about his neck, and go along by-ways, and by a side-gate, and through narrow streets till he was come to the Close and to the chancel's north side where the leper's window was. There he would kneel and look in, and behold the miracle of the Mass, and hear a little of the words ; and quickly, after the third bell had been rung, turn and go

while the streets were still void. And if at any time he saw a man coming his way, he would sound the bell about his neck, and cry " Unclean ! " So they two would pass upon opposite sides, or else the other would turn, not to meet him, and draw away into a side-street till he had passed by. After a time he became used to that grief and shame, and to go and hear Mass was the one joy he had with God and his fellow-man.

Now it happened, one day of High Mass, that, as he was going along a poor narrow street, there was a child playing upon one of the steep flights of steps that lead up to the doors ; and as the leper passed the child slipt, and cried, feeling itself falling. Then, forgetting that no help might come from him, the King put out his hand and caught the little one, and set it upon its feet. Its mother within the house, hearing the cry, ran to the door, and saw a leper handling her own flesh and blood. At that sight, between fear and rage, she threw at him the thing that first came, then seizing up a mop-stick made out after him, dealing him many hard knocks with it, and at last casting it after him as a thing that had become unclean for further handling. The leper bowed down his head and went on, stricken to the heart that not for the love of God might he do kind deed to any of his fellow-creatures.

The mother picking up her child carried it in, to wash it clean from any taint of leprosy : but when she was stripping it with shrill scoldings, all at once her voice stopped at mid-word, as her eyes

fell on its bared flesh ; for there, where before the child had borne the marks of the "King's evil," the skin was now whole and sound.

The next time the leper went by, a week after, a woman came carrying a child and following him : and she was a sister of the other woman whose child he had caught in its fall. When there was no one else in the street but themselves, she came close : "Touch my child !" she whispered ; and at that the leper moved more quickly, ringing his bell to warn her off. "I am unclean !" he said. The other did not cease following, but whenever others came in sight she drew back, as if fearful lest she should be seen ; then, as soon as they two were alone again, she came, saying, "For the love of God, touch my child !"

For the love of God ! The leper turned his eyes and looked. Through the cloth over his face he saw the mother uncovering the child's throat ; and there upon it was the mark of the King's evil. "For the love of God, oh, for the love of God !" she wept.

The leper stood still ; he reached out his hand trembling, and made the sign of the Cross over the scars. Then he turned and ran : nor did he hear the mother's cry of thankfulness, as she blessed God to behold the healing that his touch had brought.

That day he went back out of the city by another way ; and always afterwards he crept in by a different gate, and by other streets, till he reached the lepers' window within the chancel's north side. But one

day as he knelt looking in at the priest saying Mass, he heard footsteps behind, and saw three women coming to where he was ; and one was carrying a child in her arms, and one was leading another woman by the hand. When they were near to him the two women stood still, and said, " For the love of God make these whole ! "

" This is my only child," said one. " This is my sister," said the other ; " she is a deaf-mute, the King's evil has been upon her ever since she was born."

" I am unclean ! " said the leper.

" God knows," said the mother, " if you can heal my little one, you are not unclean in His sight."

The King looked in through the lepers' window, and saw the priest about to lift up the Host ; and with the three women he bowed himself to the ground at the consecration. Then the leper looked toward the Body of Christ and prayed, " O, Love of God, come by way of the lepers' window and give healing to these ! " Then he made the sign of the Cross upon each and turned and went swiftly away.

Presently through all the city the whisper went by stealth how the leper's touch had healing in it, as if he were still King by divine right, and had power such as in old time was given to good kings to do good to God's poor on earth. So, in a while, the sound of his bell, which was to warn men as he entered any street, served as a summons to those who had need of him to touch them for the King's

evil. Yet still, as he went through the poor crowds that blessed him, the leper King wore the cloth over his face, and cried "Unclean!"

At first the tale of it had been slow, for there had been doubt and fear that a leper, cut off from all men by the Finger of God, should do this thing: but presently, when the secret had passed through more than three hands, the city grew loud with it. And the cry of the poorer people was, "Give us back our King! for God, though He curses him in his own body, blesses him in all on whom he lays hands." But for a time the priests and magistrates could not hear of such a thing as for a leper to be upon the throne.

Nevertheless the healing was apparent, for many known cases had been cured; and at last the popular cry could no longer be withstood. For each Sunday, before and after Mass, the whole city was in a tumult, as the leper King came and went, with his face covered, and his bell ringing about his neck.

At last seeing that his coming made strife and uproar on God's day, the leper remained in his own hut, in the fields beyond the walls, and listened for the great bell to be rung at the elevation of the Host.

But when it was found that he meant not to come, but would stay in meekness apart from God's altar, then as one man the city rose up, and went and brought him back in triumph, and put on him again the royal robe, and set him upon the throne. And, the thing being done, no voice small or great was lifted against it.

But the King was a leper still ; and still, for all man might say, beneath his crown he wore the cloth over his face, and round his neck the bell to warn men of his coming.

And as he went through the palace where all bowed down at his approach, he still cried, " Unclean, unclean ! " nor would he allow any to touch him save it were for the cure of the King's evil, a thing that he thought to be a special mercy which, in his sins, God had given him. And when he went forth to Mass with a great train, and in all his royal robes through the streets, at the church-door he and the rest parted : and they went within, but the King passed round to the lepers' window on the chancel's north side, and there-through he heard Mass said. And from touch of him no harm came to any man ; though a leper he remained, more loved by all than any king of sound body had been in the world before.

So time went on, and it was Maundy Thursday once more. Into the courtyard came the leper King, girdled with a towel, and bearing the golden ewer ; and there all round the walls sat the beggar-men waiting for their feet to be washed.

The leper over his face was wearing the cloth, and as he moved, the bell that was round his neck rang ; and he went from one to another thanking God for having put it into his hands to do that solemn service, which he had never hoped could be his to do more. So going the round in meek thanksgiving he came to the last.

That one, at the King's coming, drew up His beggar's rags, and set down Feet marred and maimed into the golden dish. The leper, when he saw that, drew in his breath sharp, and trembled with exceedingness of joy ; but nothing was said there. Only after the washing he stooped low, and kissed the two Wounds : and still could say no word for the bliss and comfort that had there taken hold of both body and soul. And therefrom never again could he draw his lips away, for in Them mercy and truth were met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other.

His people, seeing how the King lay low before a beggar's feet, thought he had fallen from some sickness ; and going to lift him, first saw they his hands all pure of the leprosy. Then in wonder they drew the face-cloth from his face, and behold, there too all the leprosy was gone. And the bell, as they lifted him, that was about his neck, made no sound as it swung, to tell men that anything unclean was in their midst : but in all ways he was the most beautiful King that ever men swathed for burial.

Within the church, and within the chancel's north side they buried him : where the Wound was in Christ's Side, there in the church they buried him : within the lepers' window, in between that and the high altar.

There until now the King's body, which was corrupt in life, stays incorruptible for the final day, when Christ shall at last appear, and lay His Finger upon all the world, and heal it of the King's evil.

Little St. Michael

A SKY sullen with expected snow hung over the long dreariness of the wintry fields, waiting, beggar-like, for its charitable mantle to fall and cover their nakedness. A wind hard-set and edged with frost blew nippingly over the limestone scarps, and the knolls of huddled timber that made stunted markings on the way across the fens.

A young peasant stamped wearily in his clogs to get warmth, as he dragged homewards in the uncomforting twilight. In the cabin miles ahead scant warmth was waiting him ; poverty filled his dwelling, and fed three hungry mouths with the thinly leavened bread of hope for better chances on the morrow. His wife, to whom in these hard times he had become dumb from tenderness—soft speech not being for the lips of the field-bred peasantry—she was there ; waiting for the little more warmth his coming would bring, another particle of animal life wedged into the small cabin to keep cold out of door ; she waited ; it was still three miles to go. Then there was the waif, the stray child without a home, who had come with the falling-in of the early frosts, and had claimed at their hands pity for its small wants,—so small that, until the black famishing winter had gripped their hearth, they had not felt the loss of the few necessary mouthfuls of bread. The woman had taken to the child ; it came to them from God ;

God Who had set that burden on them would remember some day to be good.

Weary with travel, the peasant had not strength for the fast tread that should bring warmth into the blood. He shivered as he topped a slow rise, and looking out over a fresh stretch of waste, saw the heavy-lidded day drag into settled night. To the left, where the road wound under a barrow of bare hill, he heard a ticking sound among the stone of "Dead Man's Quarry," and saw a ruddy blade of light snap up the craggy side of the disused lime-pit.

The chirpy promise of warmth drew him within back-view of a figure seated across a sack, chipping at the quarried stone surface with a small pick. At his feet burned a fire.

"What is your want?" asked the quarryman without turning, as the other drew near.

"For God's sake, only a little warmth!" answered the peasant; "I am cold."

"That does not concern God, you may swear!" returned the other. "Make yourself warm without waiting on Him!"

There seemed to be bitter good sense in that, thought the peasant, now that he heard it so put. He sat down, and stretched feet and hands to the blaze. The fire, a lively one, ruffled and danced on its nest: nothing lay under it save a few black sticks. The shivering man took a large hug of warmth, opening coat and vest for the heat to reach in to his skin. "'Tis a good fire, this!" said he. "It warms a man!"

"It never troubled to ask God to warm *it*!" retorted the other. "It goes its own way, and thrives."

The peasant looked at the few sticks. "'Twill be out soon."

"No!" said the other, "for it never calls on God. Those that call on God—He drops them a mouthful of food, and they eat it, and being thankful are presently hungry again. To be sure, God is very merciful! But men are such sinners, His greatest mercy goes but a very little way!"

The peasant regarded the fire silently; in his own mind he was beginning to accuse God; why should he pray, and thank God, seeing that all the while he starved? "'Tis a good fire," he said again; "it warms a man!"

"You are warm?"

"Nearly; there is a bit of me that is cold."

"Ah?" queried the other, "where is that?"

"Under this metal cross that I wear, I am dead cold."

"Take it off!"

"But I have worn it for years."

"You can put it on again."

"To be sure I can!" He lifted it off. "Ah, ah!" he said, "now I feel warm all over."

"And no thanks to God for that!" said the quarryman.

"No, I suppose not," answered the young peasant. "I should be warmer at home, too, if God hadn't sent me another mouth to feed."

"And it will be more mouths, and more cold presently," returned the stone-cutter; "your wife is seeing to that."

It was true; a child of their own was promised to them shortly. "How do you know that?" asked the peasant.

"'Tis always so with the very poor. So you've a cold home?"

"Ay! cold like death; and a strange mouth to feed."

"And God's to thank for it all! Shall I give you some of my firing?"

"You have none to spare."

"Oh, but I have! This is none of your fires that wears itself out thanking God; this lasts."

"Lasts?"

"Ay! Pull out that stick with only the end just caught! I give you that to take home."

The poor peasant drew the brand out of the embers; at its end a little tongue of flame sat up, and hissed and spat. "It doesn't love Christians," said the quarryman. "The less you thank God, the better it will warm you. Go your ways now; we may meet again, I fancy."

"Luck be to our next meeting!" replied the peasant; "you have made me warm." He got up on to his feet, and set off once more on his homeward road. The firewood that he carried put out its little tongue of flame, and licked the darkness ahead with small feverish appetite. Presently the

man felt at his breast : " I have forgotten my cross ! " said he.

He paused for a moment, vexed with himself for his forgetfulness, but did not go back ; for when he turned to retrace his steps, the wind, being from that quarter, threatened to put out the small flame he sheltered and nourished in his hand.

All the way he kept warm ; and his mind ran on the quarryman's words : a wise fellow that seemed !

When he got home—" Christopher ! " cried his wife, glad to hear the sound of his feet at the threshold. There was a loaf lying on the board, but the fire was out. The foundling had been up to the priory, where they had given him the bread in charity : the woman and child were both famishing, but they had waited for the pleasure of sharing the bread with him.

He eyed it grudgingly. " 'Tis old, and looks mouldy enough ! " he grumbled. " They keep their new bread for their own bellies ! Here, I have brought warmth at least ! " He beat the firewood upon the hearth, so that it broke out into a lively flame, and shot a glow up the chimney. He, his wife, and Michael, the foundling, stooped over the blaze, eager to draw in the warmth.

Presently the child crept in between the peasant's knees, as if for comfort, and looking up, asked sadly : " This fire, why does it give no heat ? "

" No heat ! " cried Christopher roughly ; " what gives no heat, little stupid ? Your body in between me and the fire gives no heat ; go, and warm your-

self in your own way :—out of doors, if this isn't warm enough for you ! "

The child, driven from the comfortable contact of human warmth, crouched down again with face and hands close to the flames. " But it does nothing ! " he said. " It has no warmth, none ! Kind mammy, let me come over by you, and get warmth into my little body ! "

The woman called him " a soft," but at first she let him come over and lie by her. Soon, however, she found that his body kept the heat of the fire from her ; then, like her husband, she turned him out. " Foolish little Michael," said she, " if you come among poor folk, you must be satisfied with what they can get for you ! " She and her man were warm enough. She said to her husband : " This is comfort at last ; the first since ever I married you ! "

" Yes ! " said he, huffed ; " and it is my doing, and not yours ; while I have laboured, you have grown lazy ! "

" Ah ! " retorted the other, " and when my time of labour comes, it will not be your doing ? "

" The devil knows ; I don't ! " answered her husband.

The child, munching his hard crust of bread, heard for the first time his two friends quarrelling, and wondered what could have happened to make them so hot of tongue, and him so cold : for all this while the fire gave out to him no heat.

Before long the peasant and his wife turned into

the cubby-bed by the hearth, a small recess in the wall with a wooden shutter. In a little while he could hear them asleep, cosy and warm within the barrier.

Sick with cold, the child curled himself on his own bed of sacks against the hearth, and lay watching the fire, and wondering why for him it gave out no heat. Then once more he began trying to see back into the past, to find out how life had brought him to this, and why God had made him come friendless and alone to a poor door where hearts were kind.

The fire still burned bright from the one stick upon the hearth ; its flame ran out all round, making a large show. In the midst the brand turned red, and writhed like a live worm.

Presently the fire sprang off from the hearth-stone, and went capering and dancing in two tongues all over the floor. For a whole hour it danced so ; then it ran back again to the brand on the hearth, and sucked in its tongues tight and small, only flicking a tip in and out again the whole night long.

The next day the stick still burned on the hearth as brightly as one might wish ; but the child shivered and gazed hard into the middle of it.

The husband went off to work in an ill-humour, and the wife, for the first time, had a hard word for the waif whom ill-fortune had left upon her hands. Instead of going out to gather more firewood, she sat and cuddled herself over the hearth.

Little Michael came, and, kissing her, said: "Mammy, that is a bad fire; put it out!" But first she laughed, and then she was angry. "Have you only come here to trouble us?" she asked, "and to make our poverty harder to bear?"

All alone the little one went out into the bitter day; here and there he went, gathering what wood he could find. He came back laden.

"This is good firewood!" he said, as he threw it on to the hearth. For a moment he felt a glow of warmth run through his frozen body, for a sudden flame shook itself high up to the roof; but when he looked he saw that, in one instant, all his armful of sticks had been consumed, so that not an ash of them remained; all burnt up by the fire that gave no heat!

"Little fool!" cried the woman; "would you set the house on fire with your nonsense?" and at that she fetched him a blow. The child grew very white; he said, in a small whisper: "Oh, mammy, you have been so kind to me; do not beat me! If you do not want me any more, tell me to go."

But then she looked at him with some of her old kindness, and said: "I do not want you to go; only it makes me cross that you will not get warm."

"I cannot!" he said. "It is a bad fire; it gives no heat."

Every day after this, things went from bad to worse. Whenever Christopher and his wife were together now, they quarrelled; and the little

foundling had to bear hard blows from them both.

"It is the bad fire," he whispered to himself; and night by night he watched the flames come out and dance about the cabin, while the other two slept. Every night there were more and more, the room was full of them, and every evening, when the peasant and his wife were at blows and bickerings, the fire roared in the chimney like a blast-furnace.

One day little Michael was in the house alone. "I will put out the bad fire," he said. "They will beat me; but afterwards they will be kind to me again."

He brought in a pitcher of water, and emptied it over the hearth. But when he had emptied it, only a great white cloud of steam rose to the roof; and there was the evil fire as strong as before.

And now all day he sat looking into the heart of the fire, for there he saw something that moved and turned in the flame. "Do you see," he said one day to the peasant's wife, "what that is in the bad fire?"

She looked hard before she could see anything. "Why, it is a little salamander," she cried; "that means luck!"

"No," said Michael, "for this is one that grows, and keeps changing its skin."

The next day he went to beg for a certain water from the good monks. "Give me plenty!" he said. So it was blessed fresh for him, and he brought it away.

At night, when the others were asleep, the flames ran out all over the room and danced ; there were more of them than ever. Michael was very much afraid as he got up from his bedding, and went to bring the holy water out of its hiding-place. Finding it, he returned and began to sprinkle the room with it.

At that all the live tongues of flame squeaked with fear, and ran back to the brand upon the hearth, and the little devil of the fire looked out to know what it all meant.

Michael, looking in, saw a merry little grig, sitting with knees akimbo in the flame, and eyes, sharp and peery, looking out at him. He was very sorry for the little underworld urchin, and, said he, sending only a small sprinkle of water over the hearth : " Come out, naughty one, and be baptized ! "

The fire crackled and gasped ; even at that little splash of holy water half of it gave up the ghost and went. Out sprang the little devil, all quivering and red with rage.

" That is right ! " said Michael. " You come out of that bad fire ! " And he threw on more water.

One little tongue of fire was all that was left ; it leapt off the hearth, and sprang about the room to find an outlet for escape.

" Don't, don't, don't ! " sobbed the little devil, catching at Michael's bare feet. " You are killing me with cold ! Have pity on me, or I shall die ! "

"Are you cold?" asked Michael sorrowfully. "Ah! I know *that* is sad." He opened his vest. "Creep in here, and I will keep you warm. But I must put out the bad fire; it hurts."

The little devil laughed so slyly, as he crept against Michael's warm heart and felt its fast beat, cuddling a wicked jowl against the child's breast.

"He will not put out my fire now, now I have him so safe!" thought the little devil.

But Michael, with his holy water, put out the last of the wicked tongues, and at that the little devil gave a loud cry, and lay quite still on the child's heart. And Michael lay down again and felt cold, ever so much cold, striking deep down into him through body and limb; for outside had come the great frost, and inside the poor little devil lay stone-cold against his heart.

So there he lay on his coarse sack-bed, and prayed till his teeth chattered and divided the words, till even his brain was too frozen and cold to pray more.

"Oh, charity of God, take us out of this cold!"

In the morning, quite early, Christopher and his wife were woken by the bitter frost; for, now the fire was dead, it reached in even through the shutter of the cubby-bed by the hearth. And when they looked out they saw the little foundling Michael lying dead, and on his heart a small salamander lay curled, quite cold and dead also.

Then in their grief they knew how they had loved the poor foundling; a little late, but not too

late, they knew it now. And in that grief they remembered also their love for each other, which they had almost forgotten till this cold came again to remind them.

Husband and wife went to the door and opened it for the child's spirit to pass out, if by chance it still lingered ; and by the grey morning light, peace and sorrow made friends again in the two hearts.

Could their eyes have seen a little farther, they might have had sight of another Door.

There stood Peter, wary and wise, key on lip, whistling up souls from below.

To him, from the early winter's morning that lay below, a child came, bearing in his arms something which first wriggled and peered, then nestled and hid deep.

And the child, without knocking, said : " Open, Peter, and let me in ! "

St. Peter smiled, and looking at the small newcomer with friendly wisdom, said : " Oh, little Michael, there is no lock that will not let *you* in ! "

" But it is *us* ! " said the child, and he opened his vest a little way to show that something was there. At that, whatever it was, nestled and burrowed deeper to be out of sight.

" What is ' us ' ? " asked Peter.

And Michael said : " It is a poor little devil that I drove out of house and home, and he was cold and had no one but me to go to ; so, being also a foundling, and cold, for very fellowship I pitied him ! "

Then Peter laughed, and said : " This is a new Michael, indeed, that comes to-day carrying the devil in his bosom instead of trampling him under foot ! What shall old Michael say to it ? Nay, let me see this little devil of yours ! "

So Peter plucked open Michael's robe, and saw there, coiled up in great fear and trembling, a little silver salamander, whose eyes blinked timidly, lisping the celestial light.

Then Peter threw the door wide, and showed within the other Michael, his great warrior head bowed to the keyhole listening, and his body shaken with bright immortal laughter.

And said great Michael to little Michael, folding him in his arms : " Where, then, are the other salamanders you left behind ? "

At that the silver one sprang up, and coiled to perk its word at little Michael's ear : " They are far off," it said, " and busy about their father's business ! But give them time, Michael, and they will come ! Oh, they will come ! "

The Lovely Messengers

IT was Christmas Eve, and the door at the farm was shut to keep out the cold. A woman crept into the porch, and knocked timidly, then for a while waited.

While waiting, she leaned face and hands against one of the side-posts ; and from head to foot a slow trembling took hold of her, of cold, and fear, and weakness.

After the third knock a bar was let down from within, and the door swung wide on its hinges ; warm light streamed out, showing the figure of the supplicant. "Let me in, or I shall die!" the poor thing said, with a heavy forward leaning.

"Who are you?" asked the farm-woman, who had the door in her hand. "Ah, it's *you*!" There was recognition in the tone but not welcome.

"Who is it?" called out the farmer from the ingle-corner. "Don't keep the door agape, letting in all the cold!"

"'Tis Molly, the bad wench," answered the woman ; "and she's big ; to her shame be it said. Her time is not far off!"

"I won't have her here!" cried the farmer. "Let her carry her shame away from honest folks' doors! Shut it—you there, I say!"

The door was shut-to again, and barred. Molly turned and crept meekly away through the barton, past the cow-pens and outhouses. Presently she stopped, with deep shudderings from head to foot,

and leaned against a stack of hurdles for support.

"I can't go on!" she whispered. "I shall die!"

Within wooden walls she heard a rustle of straw and the snored breathings of live stock.

"I shall die, I shall die!" she moaned.

Her hand fell on a wooden bolt, shot home loosely into its socket: at a weak push it yielded, and the door creaked inwards. She entered to a warm vapourish atmosphere of animals and fermenting litter. In a corner where the straw seemed freshest and cleanest she lay down, and felt comparative peace for a while take hold of her wrenched body.

Close by went a slow munching, where the steer and the ass's colt stood loosely stalled side by side. As they munched the extra portion given them for that night's meal, they talked together of the Feast which Heaven and Earth were even then beginning to hold.

"This is the night of our inheritance," said the steer; "our fathers have told us, as their fathers told them; so it has come down to us through all the generations till to-day. I feel as if I had been there myself, and seen the Holy One who came to save the souls of those that do daily beat and ill-use us."

"Tell me," said the ass's colt, "for I am young! What were They like, the Mother and her Babe?"

The steer said: "She wore a white wimple, with a crown on it, and a blue robe with the Mag-

THE LOVELY MESSENGERS

nificat broidered about its border. And He had a golden orb in His right hand, and a light round His head ; and as soon as He was born He spoke to her."

"What did He say ? " asked the colt.

"He said, 'Hail Mary, the Lord is with thee ! ' And at that the father of my fathers and the father of your fathers bent their knees, and began worshipping Him. And ever since then, once a year, our hearts are opened, so that we know how to worship Him and do Him meet service. But not in this world shall we learn to serve Him daily, as men do ; and not for many worlds to serve him continually, as the angels do."

"When men have become as angels," said the colt, "perhaps we shall be in the place of men. How good it will be, then, to serve Him daily ! "

"Good indeed ! " replied the steer. "Kneel down ; we are near the hour of the blissful Birth."

Said the colt : "Was there no trouble at that Birth ? "

"I do not know," answered the steer ; "but the meek Mother did not cry, nor the Babe, when It was born, wail."

Presently, while the beasts bent worshipping there, a shuddering cry came from the straw ; again and again it was repeated, and the beasts knew and recognized the great central note of nature since the Fall, the cry of a mother in her pains. By and by was added to it the cry of a human when it first draws breath. Feeble and

weak, Molly stretched out her arms, and caught and laid the naked life in her breast.

The steer and the ass's colt looked on with mild and reverent fear. "The Holy Child and His Mother," said they, "have sent us these to watch and guard for a remembrance of Them."

They heard the mother moan, "Bring water, and a priest, lest my child die in sin, and be not baptized into Christ!" And as midnight grew near, they heard her say again, "It dies, it dies! Oh, for a priest, and a drop of water!"

Then for the love of Christ, on this night of His birth, the steer and the ass's colt rose up to do Him service. They went out softly by the door that lay ajar, and stole down side by side to the church that shone lighted below the hill.

All the way, over their heads, shone the Northern Lights with flicker and throb: and they knew that there, out of gold harp-strings like corn, angels were reaping melodies to God. When they got to the church it was the time of the midnight Mass. Looking in through a window they saw the Crib, and all the congregation kneeling before it. Our Lady had on a white wimple, with a gold crown on it, and a blue robe; and the Holy Child held an orb, and wore a halo round His head.

Then the two beasts beat softly upon the door with their fore-feet; and the steer lowed, and the ass brayed for the priest to come out and carry Christ to the child's soul.

One of the servers came out to drive them away:

but they bore all his strokes patiently, and stayed there waiting for the priest to come forth. "Let us wait quietly!" said the steer at last. "When the Mass is over he will come."

So silently they watched, and heard the Sanctus sung, and bowed themselves at sacring-bell; till presently the congregation came out, and last of all the priest.

The priest was in a hurry to get back to his bed and be warm; and lo, and behold, down knelt the ass right in the way before his feet! Whichever way he turned, there the steer and the ass hemmed him in.

Soon the priest began thinking, what marvel was this? Had the two beasts that worshipped at Christ's cradle been sent by God, in reward to him for his services, to bear him home? "Non dignus sum!" said he, crossing himself; and therewith he sat himself on the back of the beast, and rode.

Ass and steer walked on together; but when they came to the dividing of the ways that led to the priest's house, and to the farm, by no means could the priest get himself brought nearer where he would be. There in the cross-roads the colt danced him round like a wind-worshipping weather-cock.

At length, so stirred was he with resentment at the brute so ill-fulfilling the heavenly dictates of its mission, that lifting up his staff he struck the colt roundly three times, bidding it go on in the name of the Blessed Trinity.

And thereat his eyes were opened, and he saw One leading the ass in the way up to the farm. And she had on a blue robe, and a white wimple with a crown over it, and a Child on her arm bearing an orb ; and light rayed round them.

Then the priest was so stricken with fear, that he tried with all his courage to fall off the colt, but could not ; and presently at the crest of the hill they turned in by the farmyard gate. Then the ass stood still, and the priest found his feet trembling on firm ground.

Over the heavens shot the Northern Lights, wherein were the angels making melodies to God ; but within the stable was more light than came from them. Looking in, he saw that the ass and the steer had entered, and were bowed forward upon their knees ; and between them was she of the blue robe and wimple and crown, bearing a Babe.

The priest fell face forward to the earth ; and when he lifted himself there was no light within the stable save that which came from the Northern Lights : and he entering saw a young mother lying asleep, with a new-born babe in her arms.

But around and over her poor clothing lay the white wimple, and the blue robe broidered with the words of the Magnificat : the same which he had seen worn by Her who went before, leading the ass, and bearing the Blessed Child.

The Love-Child

THE child appeared to have been born under some quiet starry influence, which made its days different from those of other children. The dull tedium of sick-bed hours rested without weight on a mind whose thoughts seemed fixed on some movement in the great starry courses, making the little times of earth very easy to be borne.

The mother saw with a moved heart that her child had intuitions beyond her ; and a sort of jealousy grew in her heart lest there might be some one to whom he belonged more than to herself.

For three years, since his birth had stamped her so differently in men's eyes, and set her so definitely beneath the lowest of her own class, her peasant nature had been schooled and refined by contact with the unreasonable quiet patience of her little one. Its goodness left the mother's heart hollow with a sort of hunger, longing just for once to be filled by the cares of a child's shortcomings. No waywardness to be conquered, no fretfulness to be lulled and soothed, no nights to be broken into unrestful vigil by its crying : these wants robbed her maternity of its functions.

Every day, when the wintry season forced her to leave the little one at the cabin and go out to her work in the fields alone, she would stop at a neighbour's to say : " I have left the door on the latch ; you will go in if the babe cries ? "

And the answer, "He never cries," filled her brain through the period of toil with aching thoughts of the hour-long silence in which absence was endured without complaint.

The quiet cooing that greeted her returns had a note of unnatural contentment; there was no passionate leap to her breast, as if to be quit of the heavy hours in the joy of restored companionship, no demand to be made much of as a recompense for enforced loneliness. Sometimes the weariness of that whisper of existence came on her past bearing, and she would fondle the child almost fiercely, calling on it to cry aloud and to ease her longing for the mundane cares of motherhood.

But as winter drew in, Molly's uninstructed heart was touched now and then with a contentment, akin to the child's, which she could not understand. The hardening of the ground and the scarcity of work suited, perhaps, with a mind made to move in poverty of idea and poverty of circumstance. Then it was that the life of the whole world came into closer touch with her own and her child's. She preferred, possibly, a gloom out of which she could get less bitterness of comparison.

Also, at this time was her one small festival of the year. Her child's birthday fell in with Christ's—Christ-like in many of its circumstances. Before dawn on Christmas Day, to a stable with beasts standing by, a priest had come strangely summoned and given it its name "Noel," when

life seemed not to be in it. And the priest, who afterwards had heard her confession with a reverence and kindly allowance strange to one in her case, had said with some weight of inner meaning in his words, "Maybe God wills for your son to be one of the blessed Saints."

To her he was that already; and she cherished as an omen the happy accident which let her joy in the birth of Christ be joy also over the birth of her own son. For this she made savings, when harvest-time brought wages which necessity did not entirely eat up: tiny savings, indeed, but enough to set up a "crib" by her own hearth, with two wax-lights, and sheep made out of white wool, and an ox and an ass of carved wood, which her child, from the first time of seeing, had specially loved to reach out his hand and caress. No toys but these had ever charmed his quiet instincts; and his mother saw often with surprise how deeply they possessed his mind with a sense of actual life.

To the crib itself his devotion was uncanny; for now, in his third year, from the time when the days began visibly to shorten, his question had been, "When will the Child-Christ come?" And the question increased in intensity as a certain added feebleness showed in the body from whence it sprang.

When the Noel moon was beginning, Molly wished speed to the feast; for a dread that she had prayed away from her heart settled deeply back

on it. That one joy of their lives, the chief out of so very few—she claimed it of God's will that she and her little one might once more share it together. And yet, as the day drew near, that chance seemed like a feather resting upon the lips of her son ; any day a deeper breath might send it away, and the woolly sheep and the wax-lights be there in vain.

It came to her mind to put commemoration forward, so as to assure to herself a comfortable memory in the days after ; but the child knew with a curious certainty not of her planting, and corrected her when she started on preparations some days before the actual fall of the feast.

On Christmas Eve she came home scantly laden with the last small things to make complete their own niche in the heart of Christendom that night ; but at her coming in, set them down quickly, fearing that already her trouble was past date.

It was plain that her child's suffering was great ; but a resolute happiness was there also, infinitely painful, giving her no liberty but to go on and build up, out of the materials she had, Christ's welcome to the dimming world of her child's brain.

The sick Noel lay propped on her knee, watching with faint eyes while she busied herself putting the toy-pieces together. Each one lay on his lap, and was caressed by him before it passed to his mother to be set in its proper place.

The midnight was still a little way off when she

ended, and noticed a quietness that had come without cry to the small form within her arms. With the same unnatural resignation that had marked his endurance of pain, he had let life slip out of him without one complaint or fondling appeal before it went.

As a tree keeping its last leaf when the great frost has come, the mother sat quite still, to have at least that outward seeming of herself and child once more worshipping at the crib of Christ. With Christmas dead in her arms, she reached softly over and kindled the wax tapers and began to pray. And, presently, her heart moved by the pleasant sight which the child had so long looked forward to, she began to speak :

" Look, Noel, there is the star ; and behind, among the sheep, are the shepherds ! Now presently we shall see the ox and the ass go down upon their knees. Is not our Lady beautiful ? She is younger than I am ; and the Holy Child, He is younger than you ; but He stretches out His arms, seeming to say, ' Come, little Noel, come out of your mother's lap and play with Me ! ' "

The bereaved mother's voice went out in a cry, as she caught the meaning death had given to her words ; and she shut her eyes suddenly from the sight of that too happy Nativity.

There was a sound of the latch lifting ; the door opened, showing outside a world of snow. Across the threshold stepped a Child. Three winters' summers seemed to have touched His

cheeks ; under His gown His feet were the colour of apple-blossoms. His eyes laughed, His head was a tumble of curls ruddy and gold.

He ran across to Molly's side ; but, not looking at her, touched the little cold body that lay in her arms, crying : " Come, little Noel, come out of your mother's lap and play with Me ! "

Molly's little son jumped from her knee, and ran to his new playmate. The cottage began filling with laughter, and the running of bare feet. Poor Molly opened her eyes, she had never seen her son play before ; he had not known how, and yet the mere sight of this Child had taught him. And such games ! When she came afterwards to try description of them, she could not. Some of them seemed to have no earthly meaning ; and yet her own little one knew them all by heart, he needed no telling.

The mother wondered : " Is that what he used to be watching, with his little face looking up ; that I could never see what it was ? Ah, and how well he plays it now, as well as that other Child almost. How they run round and round ; yet they do not fall or knock anything down, or hurt themselves ! It is wonderfully done. And hear how they laugh ! They will make all the neighbours come in ; and they will say : ' Who is that Child of high parentage playing with your poor son ? His parents ought to know of it ! ' And I shall laugh and say : ' His parents *do* know ! ' Ah, ah, how proud it makes me ! "

It seemed to her as if a whole childhood were going on there : all the gladness of a lifetime pressed into a single hour. Soon, in her happiness, she began to forget herself altogether as she watched the two children at play.

" Now let us play at gathering flowers ! " cried the high-born Child. And it was so strange : as they stooped and began picking, all the floor became filled with Christmas roses of wonderful form and scent. The playmates filled their arms with blossoms, so full that they had to double their little bodies back to carry them. " Now it is ' Follow-my-leader,' " cried the Child ; and, He leading, they ran across to the crib and threw in Christmas roses till all the ground there looked like snow.

Then, crying, " Follow, follow ! " the Child ran and emptied the rest of His roses into Molly's lap, and after Him little Noel came and did the same. Then He climbed up on to the side of Molly's chair and gave her a kiss, so kind a one that her heart leaped up with joy ; and after Him came her little son, and kissed her with clasping arms and warm lips that had in them the scent of flowers and the breath of a spring wind.

But " Follow, follow ! " the Child went on calling, and already was running toward the door, so that little Noel sprang down quickly to be after Him.

The door swung open to the still beauty of the wonderful night. Out over the snow the mother watched them running, the Child ahead, and her

little son close behind. Up the hill they ran, till in the distance they seemed to become one ; till, on the brow where the hill touched the sky, they became lost to view.

But up the track where the first Footprints led, Molly could see a row of shining stars ; and side by side with them, never straying, went the footprints of her departed grief.

From that fair outer vision she turned to the home now left to her void and desolate. Yet all the place was still sweet with the fragrance of strange blooms : and in her arms, his hands still laden with the like, lay the body of her dead son.

The Staff of Life

THE hot sun blazed on the white-limed walls of the village and on the sandy footway that led up to the headman's house. Under the door-lintel hung a clay bottle containing water ; about the mouth of it went the slow buzz of flies.

Three gleaners had come up from the harvest-field and thrown down their bundles in a small lean-to shed that abutted on the wall. They knew that already, up in the low room on the roof, the child lay dead.

"Where has his mother gone?" asked one.

"She has gone to find the man of God."

"Ay? Will she bring him back to-night, think you?"

"She took the best of the asses, and one of the lads to run with it. She will not be long."

"Have you been in to see him?"

"No ; he is in the little chamber, and the door is shut."

"There is the window ; over the top of the shed one might climb and look in."

The youngest rose, and wrapped her veil thickly for a protection over her head.

"Against the wall there it is like a furnace," she said, as the others helped her to climb.

"What do you see?" they asked presently, when she had pushed in the shutter.

"It is so dark!" she answered, and then—"Ah! I begin to see his hand. Oh yes ; the little straw-

basket he was making is still in it ! Now the flies are coming too ; some one ought to go in and cover him."

" No, not in there ! No one goes in."

" Now I see his face—like a girl's. Ah ! she has put flowers ; they have not faded—in there it is quite cool." She drew back the shutter, and came down again.

Across the sand wriggled a scorpion : with it trailed a string fastened upon one of its limbs.

One of the women pointed : " He did that yesterday—he was playing with it. Catch it, and tie it till she comes back ! She will like to see it ; she will remember ; it will help her to weep."

A man came running up the street, carrying a staff. Even to the red fillet he wore he was grey with the dust of his speed. He passed the women without looking at them, and went up by the stepping-stones in the wall to the chamber on the roof.

" He is from the man of God ! " said one of the women, and she went over and bowed her forehead to one of his footprints in the sand. Another reached down the jar of water and waited. When the messenger emerged and descended, she held it to his lips.

" Peace be with you ! " he said after drinking, and started out with speed to return by the way he had come.

The third woman again climbed to the roof of the shed, and looked through the slot in the wall. " He has laid the staff over the body," she said. " It lies straight down from head to foot."

"Come, make haste!" said the others, "we must go down and carry this water to the reapers; the steward will beat us for being so long."

"We will tell him his master's child is dead; then he will forget to beat us."

They had left their heavy pots at the well. Filling these, they lifted them to their heads, and went erect and freehanded down into the plain whence came the sound of reaping.

One said: "Abner himself is reaping; the gleaning he leaves belongs to me to-day. Do not tell him the child is dead—he will stop, perhaps, to mourn."

"We be sisters," said the others, "and will share with you; we will not tell."

In the evening when it began to be dark, Abner returned to his house. Up in the village the news met him that the child had been dead, and was living because the man of God had come.

The door of the house had sheaves piled round it, and garlands across the lintel. Against the sheaves sat the mother holding the child in her arms. He was playing with the little scorpion—now dragging it back by its string, and again driving it forward with a switch. The scorpion danced with rage, and the child smiled with quiet pleasure whenever his mother laughed.

"See!" she cried, holding him up, "your son lives!"

As soon as he saw that it was his father, the little one got off his mother's lap, and trotted up to make filial obeisance. Each little step he

made was a glimpse of paradise to the mother ; she cried, weeping : " He lives, but he has not spoken ! "

Abner lifted the child in his arms. " My son," he said, " where hast thou been ? What has God done for us this day ? "

The boy looked down into his father's face with pleased shyness ; he parted the black beard, and looked in at the red mouth that smiled at him ; then he dropped, and snuggled his head, looking aslant at the villagers, who gaped, watching him. Shyly his look slid back to his father's face, where the big mouth was ; and again he parted the beard, and thrust forward the invitation of a playful finger. " Open ! " he said, and the mother cried aloud for gladness at hearing once more the sound of her child's voice.

All the while the child and his father played with grave preoccupation. Now the mouth bit too soon, now too late. At last the finger was caught and held.

" Ow-wow ! " cried the boy in vexation, peevish at the teeth for biting too hard, and at himself for getting trapped over-quickly in a good game.

" If I let you go, speak then ! " cried the father. " Tell us where you have been ! "

" I will speak ! " said the child : and the expectant crowd drew in.

Abner sat down, holding his son between his knees. The boy lifted his eyes and drew a procrastinating breath. For invention that flagged he caught a respite. " He is up there ! " he nodded mysteriously, meaning the man of God.

"The babe tells the truth!" cried his mother. "The great one is yonder in his chamber."

"Ah, bah!" said the father. "Go on, and tell us where you have been!"

"The sun made me sick," said the child, jogging his mind for something to say; "I was hot, and I lay down. Presently I went to sleep; then I knew where the man of God was. In my mouth was a little grain of seed—something I had eaten. A raven came and carried the seed away, and took it to the man of God. The man of God put it in the ground, till presently it grew up, and he sat under the shadow of its leaves. I was glad because he was cool."

He looked at the ring of faces—of men and women and grey-beards all straining to listen to his words. He became self-conscious, stopped, and began peering. "Where is he with the pincers?" he asked. He was comforted when his stringed reptile was returned to him.

"I tell you," he said, rousing it anew by sudden jerks at the string, "the tree made a blue shadow with its leaves over the prophet. He ate the fruit; out of the branches he cut a staff for himself."

"The staff he sent!" cried the mother. "Let thanks be!"

"When the staff came," said the child, "coolness came: the sickness went out of me. But when the man of God came, all the corn-sheaves by the door stood up and bowed."

"It is holy truth!" cried the mother, who had

not seen it. "Hear now the mouth of the blessed babe!"

The child let fall the string, for the worried scorpion, biting itself, had died, and lay useless and unamusing in the sand.

"What more?" asked Abner.

"Only when I awoke I was well, and the man of God was there. Carry me up that I may look at him, for he belongs to me!"

The father lifted the child, and went up to the small chamber on the roof. At the doorway he had to stoop low for entering. In the dusk, upon the bed, the prophet lay stretched in exhausted slumber; by his side a staff, blossoming wonderfully, distilled a strong fragrance about the room.

The child put his hand to his head as if some pain were there, and spoke slowly and with difficulty. "My father," said he, "years hence, when thou art long laid in thy grave, and the day comes when the mourners cry for me, bearers will again carry me as now to the place where yonder man of God lies. And so soon as my flesh touches his bones, I shall revive because of him, and stand up upon my feet a living man! Lay me down by him!"

Abner laid down his son; and already the child was asleep, with his face in the prophet's beard.

"I have heard thy son speak prophecy!" said Abner to his wife, when he had come down from the loft; "and he tells that there is to be a future life. Yea, wherefore not? for I saw the staff, and it blossomed!"

The Merciful Drought

DEEP drought was on all the forest, a drought that went down to the roots of things, so that the earth's surface chipped and cracked, and lay gaping with parched lips for something to drink. Whenever the least leaf stirred it gave out a crisp sound like fire, so dry was it become ; and every twig and branch as it moved ticked and crackled with the heat. The foot-dints of the herds, that had waded there to drink, were now hardened in the dry clay of the stream's bed ; along the banks all the willows curled up the white under-sides of their leaves, half dead for lack of rain.

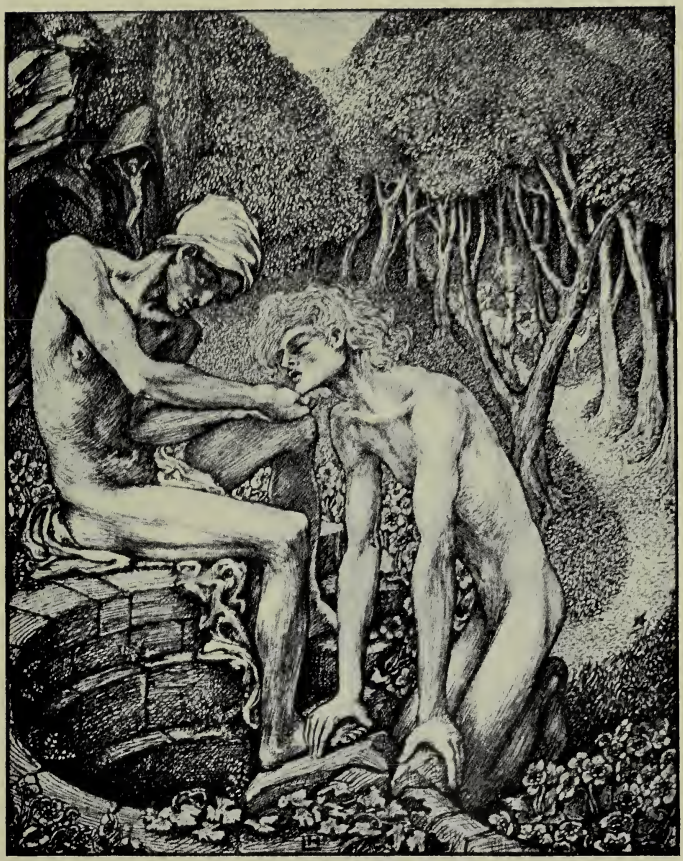
The Saint, sitting up by the hermitage, where cover was coolest, knew that this was the merciful drought which God sends from heaven once in a generation to the lost souls of men. For he had read in certain holy books how at that time all the water that goes to and fro over the earth's surface is sucked down by the many mouths of hell, till even their thirst is, for the time, assuaged, and their yoke of torture made light. Then, that they may win ease, sorrow and affliction are given to all that here has life ; that thus, even for our lost brethren, we may feel pity, and endure the cost of it ; even as Christ did for us, though the cost to Him was the drought and the death of Calvary. And by the drought which He sends, and which we bear, He teaches us that there is not only a Communion of Saints

but a Communion of Sinners, as also He showed forth in His Sermon on the Mount, wherein He taught how God maketh His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

All this the Saint learned in his reading, and also how God by His wisdom made the sea salt, lest that also should be drunk dry, and leave the earth a waterless wilderness with no more stores of rain ; also how all holy wells that belong to the Saints are left, at that time, to the dwellers on earth, so that in their affliction they may be turned to Him, and to the Church, which is His outstretched Hand let down to earth for all sinners.

The Saint pondered on all these things through the hot weariness of day, till night rose, covering the sky. Under the rock by his side the holy well brimmed large in the light of the moon ; and presently along the forest came the soft trampling of feet, and all the animals came out of the shadows to drink.

There were the hinds with their young, the hares and all the little burrowing people, the squirrels and the rest of the tree-folk, and all the root-grubbers : none of them was missing. They saw the Saint, sitting silver in the moonlight, and they waited, for they knew the well was holy and belonged to him. Except in times of drought and famine none came to drink there but only those who had lips to confess their sins and to pray, because for them the water of the well had virtue.



THE MERCIFUL DROUGHT

Then the Saint made the sign of the Cross towards them. "Peace be with you!" he said; and at once all the herds and tribes of fur moved down together to the water to drink.

Right up to midnight they came, dipping their nozzles to the long draught: yet still the well brimmed large, and its water diminished not.

The Saint, watching, remembered how Christ fed the multitude, and how, at the last, more remained than had been broken at the beginning. Now the drought had reached its height; and every day, since the stream had disappeared, the animals had come to beg of the amiable hermit abatement for their thirst; and he had sent them away satisfied, and still the well held water to its brim.

When all had drunk, they stayed to see his hand lifted in blessing. "Go in peace!" said the Saint, and all the herds moved back into the forest.

But now, on this night, out of the solitude when all were gone, a figure came and stayed. And this one stretched out hands, and knelt by the well's brink waiting.

The Saint, looking, saw that the Cross had been removed from this man's brow, and that the only covering he had for his nakedness was a garment of outer darkness. Therefore, knowing to what place the other belonged, he crossed only himself, being afraid, and spake no word of greeting.

The man said, "Father, dip down thy finger in the water, and lay it upon my tongue, for I am consumed by a great thirst!"

The Saint said, "Is it not the merciful drought? Go to thine own place, and get drink!"

The other answered, "Last night when I died I went down, and found there that the merciful draught was over and the flow of water stayed, and that all had tasted but had left no drop for me. Therefore for three nights it is given me to return to the earth to find mercy of man."

"Doubt not," answered the Saint, "that the time of thy death was in God's Hands; return, therefore, whence thou camest!" Then the doomed man and the Saint arose each and went to his own bed.

The next day when the Saint looked out over the forest, still the drought was not gone; and when he came to the well he found that it had run dry. "It is the lost soul," thought the Saint, "whose coming has driven away the water."

When it was night all the herds came up out of the forest to drink, as they had been used to do before; by the side of the empty well the Saint sat weeping. They stood watching him, and waiting for the word to be spoken.

The Saint prayed, "O Lord, open the hard rock, and let Thy mercy rush forth!" But the place of the waters remained dry. And still all the animals watched and waited for the sign.

At midnight a sudden fear took hold of them, and they fled; and there came to the well's brink once more the same form of a man, who stooped and looked in. "Last night," he said, "more

water was sent to the souls ; but I got none of it, having come here to find mercy. Now, therefore, dip down thy finger, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented with this thirst."

The Saint said, "Thy coming has troubled the waters ; for they are holy, and thou art accursed, and thy presence has dried them and driven them back. Go hence, and return no more !"

"Yet once I must return !" answered the other ; and he rose sadly, and left that place.

All the next day the Saint heard lamentations and cries of suffering through the forest ; and he knew that all the wild things were perishing for lack of the water that had failed. And now, there being no drain or drop left in the holy well, the Saint himself was feeling the pains of thirst ; and all night without sleep he had heard the moans of the forest in pain, and no succour could he bring. Thus there came to him a sense of his own unworthiness, which years of solitude by his well of sweet waters had made him forget. So the next night he knelt praying by the dried spring, that water might come forth, not for himself, but that the beasts of the forest might live.

And ever more and more the thirst within him increased ; and the silver moon rose in cool pitiless strength, and struck his brain with the fear of madness.

He grovelled and dabbled with his hands in the yet moist mud where the well-water had lain. "Now I feel the pains of the damned !" he said,

and knew that presently all sense and life would be taken from him.

To and fro within the forest went the trampling of feet, and the soft scurry of furred creatures ; but to-night none came near him. The holy waters had failed, and the Saint had turned God's poor away empty. All around him was solitude to the eye ; he saw the moon moving on to the hour which must bring him death. There he bowed and lay low on the stone brink of the well. " O God, have pity on me," he said, " for I have sinned ! "

Out from under the trees paced a stag, milk-white, lifting up its head to the moon. Between its antlers it held the blessed rood, and upon every tine burned a clear taper, unbent by the wind. The Saint beheld there the stag of Saint Hubert.

Slowly it moved down to the spring, still lifting its front to the light in the heavens overhead ; and all the while the Saint crouched watching, frozen with holy fear. At last the stag's feet stood at the well's brink, and out of its eyes, that were raised to the moon, large tears grew and began falling apace. Softly sobbing there for the sorrow of the whole forest, and of meek creation in pain, it looked intercessor and pleader for its own kind where the help of man had failed. Then, when its tears rained no more, it turned about and went back into the gloom of the forest, and the Saint was left alone.

Looking down he saw that, where the stag's tears had fallen, a small pool of water had risen, enough for a man to hold in the hollow of his hand.

The Saint saw all his thirst at an end, and stooped down his lips to drink. "Blessed be God," he said, "blessed be His holy name!" And as he said so, he saw by his side the same shape as on former nights, and the lips of the doomed man opening towards him in the gloom, and the hands reaching out and pleading for thirst to be quenched.

And now the Saint's suffering had made a brother of him; and he made the sign of the Cross towards the man, saying, "Now I know thy sorrow: drink, and be satisfied, and depart from me in peace!"

He dipped down his hand into the well, and drew out the drops of water in the hollow of his palm for the other to drink. There was a sigh of indrawn waters, like the sound of a great river going down to the sea; and the Saint's hand was hot and dry, as if it had been held to the mouth of a furnace; but the man's form was no longer there. And suddenly all the waters of the well lay large and brimming to the moon.

Then from the forest came the trampling of many feet, and all the herds and furred things, the stag of Saint Hubert leading them.

The Saint made the sign of the Cross toward them. "Peace," he said, with parched lips, "Peace be with you!" And slowly and solemnly all the four-footed ones moved down and drank at the stream.

There came a sound of the quenching of many thirsts, and to the Saint it was as good as the sweetest Sanctus bell ever heard on earth. And when all

the beasts had well drunk, and gone back into the forest, leaving the Saint alone, then he, with deep humility, took his place in that lowest room which God had given him for his body's need.

And as he drank and drank, there came rain, and the patient heart of heaven was loosed.

The Troubling of the Waters

GOD, who had taken the light out of Eyloff's brain, had left him this : for all flesh, whether it moved on ground or had wings for air, the love of his slow wits and quick-beating heart.

In the dawn of his manhood, a cloud, the shadow of his own hand, had fallen on him. Very dimly he knew that then he had struck down in anger one weaker than himself ; to-day, because of that, a cripple lay hunched in a corner of the home, ever ready to revile him to his face, and to cast at him the name of the man first guilty of a brother's blood.

The shadow of that never lifted : once it had been black as night and death, closing him in solitude. Now, for his dimness of mind, men forgave him, all but that one whose mocking laughter was as the voice of Abel's blood,—a voice more dear to him now than his own life.

Of all his loves he loved this one the most. The small misshapen brother whose hate followed him to the door, and waited hungering for his return, was to the foolish greatness of his heart the sum-total of love. The cattle upon the farm, the sheep out on the hills, the small wild wood-creatures that came at his call, all these were but reminders of the little brother at home, with shrill cursing tongue, and weak hand ever up and ready to strike : nor had he wit enough to thank God each day on his knees, for making his wits so slow.

He went happy and loved through all the country-side ; and happy and loving came back at night to render to his brother the spoils of his dull vagrancy.

By all who knew him the name of his former life was compassionately restored to him. Passing neighbours would cry, " Eyloff, how is the little brother to-day ? " And the foolish face would lighten up to answer : " The blessed one was alive when I left home ! "

It was life, not health ; the dull wits understood so much, and their own share in that sorrow. Cain ! The word was dinned into him ; accepted on his part with a grave sort of proprietorship, as each night he returned home fagged to give report of his day's faring, his hands full of foolish litter such as might perchance serve to give his cripple tyrant a few moments of contemptuous diversion.

So, one day it would be thus : " Little brother, these are hawk's eggs that Cain has brought you,—one for each eye."

" But how many were in the nest ? " asked the cripple. " Did you not bring all ? "

There were more : he could not count,—one for each finger. Cain left those others : the mother-bird wanted them.

" Come, fool, let me get where I can strike you. There ! that is for each one you did not bring. To-morrow go and fetch me the rest."

A soft slyness crept into the idiot's face.

" The little brother does not think. It is far, and one has not enough mind to remember the

tree : before he finds it again the little birds will be fledged and flown."

" No, not flown ! " said the cripple. " Wait till the eggs hatch, and bring me the young ones ! " His face grew sharp and eager, and his thin hand went out like a claw.

But Eyloff's brain was a sieve : what he did not first bring was never remembered after. Sometimes, maybe, the idiot would have a dull consciousness of commands ignored, and would bring thin wands of osier, or hazel twigs, to his master's hand, and laugh to take chastisement. The hand that struck was pitifully weak, heavy on an arm that could barely lift it, but it had grip and could pinch : Cain had found out that.

There was much in the cripple's spite that Cain could not find out the use or the meaning of : the shrill tongue went beyond reach of the closed brain ; there was a wall somewhere : and he kept coming to it. Eyloff knew that at some place his life had been cut in two ; the other was always trying to teach it him, but always his power to grasp it failed. After a few words the idiot's mind was off the track ; he would sit wistfully groping, trying to follow the sense of the telling that took so long. Then he would smile and say, " Cain forgets ! " And the other would jeer, and cry insults on his stupidity.

Yet sometimes he had a sense that at one corner of his mind a memory lay thinly covered. It came seldom when he was at home ; but out in the fields

when his bare feet touched grass, or when he went and lay at noon under the tree shadows with the herds ; or more still if at night he watched the wild things creeping out of their lairs, and most once at a sheep-washing ;—a sense came to him of a time long ago, a night of moonlit waters, and of himself, lifted out of a great darkness, standing naked, waist-deep, amid fellow beasts that waded and bathed, and then had come a sudden rain of tears, washing his mind clean for the feeble twilight of memory that thereafter struggled and grew.

Never could he quite fathom it ; only he knew that from him no beast, wild or kind to the ways of man, ever took fright ; all alike came friendly to his foolish companionable summons for caress. A strange love for beasts in their maternity swayed him ; shepherds, sleeping out in wooden huts on the downs at the lambing season, found in him a surer guide than the best sheep-dog. Too feeble in wits to be more laboriously employed, it was Eyloff's chief pride to be called out on a dark, blowy night, and sent scouting across the fens for the scattered ewes, with his ears open for the faint cry of new-born lambs.

But for all that was known of him, a rumour passed that more remained unknown of his strange power over the lower kinds ; some said that by loss of wit he had won to queer fellowship. Either that, or wizardry was at work. A ploughman told how, at uphill work, his yoke of oxen had pulled to a standstill in a slush of mire, and lo, how Eyloff

coming by had gone between, put his arms over their fore-quarters, and with gentle croakings cheered the beasts into motion, and accomplished the ascent.

Also it was well known that, for a hunt, though none knew the woods as he did, he was never to be found to give help. Over his knowledge of those wilds, looks exchanged a memory which kindness forbore to utter : men were content now to call him God's fool, and to let him be. Only within the walls of his own home the cry of " Cain ! Cain ! " greeted him.

" Cain, why have you been so long ? " was the complaining cry that met him one day on his return after long absence. His hands, and all the pouches and loose corners of his shredding raiment, were full of a protruding litter of woodland spoils ; the carrying of fruit had stained his scratched hands red. He laughed as he laid down the offering : he had yet more to show and tell.

" Bloody hands ! " jeered the cripple. " Keep off ! you have touched me too often with those ! What Cain's work have you been at to-day ? "

" Cain has found you the gums that you were asking for, little brother," said the gentle idiot, and placed them for show. " Then, here are red berries ; they will keep bright through the winter on a string. And look," he said, " here is a little dead weasel ; it has warm fur."

The cripple caught it up, and threw it in his brother's face. " What do I want with it dead ? " he cried passionately. " Let me see something

alive ! Here I live in a coffin all day, a dead log because of you ! Oh, curse you ! if I could kill you, you are the one thing I would most like to see dead in all the world."

The fool laughed, and crouched by the side of the old wizened child. " Little brother, Cain has something he will tell you ; he has been far to-day, where nobody else goes, because the thickets scratch like cats as you go through them. In there, there is a mother-fox, with five little cubs ; they are good to play with."

" You stink of them ! " said the cripple, pushing away the face that in its eagerness had come too close.

" Ah, ah ! " cried Eyloff softly, " they are so young, they cannot bite yet, but they try ! They come and take hold by the ears, while the mother rolls and laughs, and looks on. They make noises ; they bark and squeal ; but they are more like kittens than puppies. Ah, ah ! and the old mother is so proud ! "

The cripple pulled himself half up to listen. " Ah, fool ! what is the use of telling me all this ? Let me see them ; bring them to me—then I shall laugh ! But to hear and not to see, only makes me cry, because I cannot go ! "

" Come, then," said Eyloff, " Cain shall carry you ! "

" And be torn and scratched all the way ? " jeered the other. " Cain would be glad to see me bleed again ! No ; go and bring them for me to see :—then I shall laugh."

"He shall bring you one," said Eyloff, "if the mother-fox will let him. It will not be for long." He jumped up, and ran out laughing, glad to have hit on a thing that would give real pleasure to the dear idol of his brain.

All the way he ran, till he heard in the cover the shrill noise of the fox-cubs tussling together at their play. The vixen lay waiting confidently, as the big gentle creature she did not fear came close.

He knelt down, and picked up one of the cubs, and laid it within his shirt, looking inquiry at the mother all the while, to know if she would let him have it without fear. She watched his eyes with a slow intentness of regard. Eyloff gave back the faith of her look. "He will bring it back," he said; "he will not harm it."

The vixen got up and came close to snuff under his shirt, where the little one lay. The fool put one hand on her head and the other under it, and so holding it he looked well into her eyes. "Let her have no fear!" said he. "He loves it: he will not harm it; let him take it for a little while!"

Her placid eyes took no shadow of doubt from his; she snuggled her head once more into his shirt, and licked the cub lying curled there. Eyloff felt her tongue move also across his breast with warm, rough touch, and by that sign knew that she trusted him. She went back and lay down by the four little cubs left at play, and Eyloff, carrying his one cub, turned and made off through the thickets in the direction of home.

All the way as he ran, the little one played, biting gently on to the hand that held it : it had not missed its playfellows when he brought it, warm and full of frolic, to where his brother lay waiting for him. The cripple laughed, and reached out his hands for it. "You have been slow!" he grumbled.

Eyloff watched while the young cub transferred its game to his brother's thin fingers ; saw the little brother's face too, pleased and glad to have under it that sight of harmless wild-wood life. Over and over he turned it, tempting it to play.

Suddenly, as he watched, Eyloff uttered a cry, snatched it out of his hands, and ran ; ran hard to get back with it to its home in the safe thicket of the wood. And, as he raced, he looked and saw that the little thing still lived : felt and hoped, and knew by its warmth that so much was true—that it lived, just lived; and that with speed he might yet restore it alive.

Then, while he was stumbling a headlong course through the brushwood, the mother-fox came running. With a bark of joy she leapt up on him, fawning to have touch of her young.

Suddenly her note changed pitifully. Loud and wild, her cry of fear for her own challenged him to let go the burden he withheld. Blinded with tears, he obeyed her and set it down—and saw that it still lived.

The dumb beast, searching it over with tender, nursing touch, cried and licked without ceasing ; while Eyloff, watching, wondered why the old

darkness did not again descend and cover this dim twilight of his brain, deepened now into the colour of blood. She took no heed of him, showing neither fear nor hate at his presence ; only she licked and cried over her cub as she made a separate and safe place in her nest for its hurt life.

Not that night did Eyloff's home see him again ; and when at last he came, for the first time he was dumb to the railing greeting cast at him, and, without a smile or word, went and sat down by his brother, waiting pitifully to be taught sense, while still over his brain thick darkness wavered and stayed.

Every day he went back to the wood, and there found the vixen and her one cub lying together, and hard by the four other cubs at play. Of her charity the mother let him look into the nest, and assure himself that it still lived—just lived. In his abasement he had no thought to touch it—to know more than his eye told. And still the darkness hung over his brain, but did not descend.

One day as he came he heard a quick bark of welcome, and saw the vixen running to meet him ; and behind her, by the nest, were five fox-cubs that played. She went, and picking out one, brought it and laid it in his hands with soft yelps of delight ; and the little one turned, cuddling, and nibbled his fingers, and played.

Then once more came a vision into Eyloff's brain of moonlit waters, and of himself, waist-deep, with beasts wading and looking on ; out of his eyes a river of tears washing madness from his

brain ; and a voice—was it his own ?—praying : "O God ! O God ! I that was once a man !"

The darkness that had threatened lifted away ; doubt and vague memory only remained. He looked down at the thing so strangely alive in his hands : yesterday it had lived—just lived ; to-day it was sound and well. He was roused from his dazed wonder to find that he was holding the little cub hard against his breast. Then he felt the vixen's tongue, warm and rough ; and at that fell to weeping like a child, to the pity of the dumb beast.

That day he went home laden with spoil, and laughed with the old foolish love when his brother railed at him ; for once more his slow mind had forgotten what went before. The loved tyranny of the old life resumed its sway ; Eyloff went and came gladly at the other's bidding, and paid back his hatred with slow, large love.

One night—it was just a year from the day when he had come to find the little fox-cub whole and sound—he was sitting at home, trying out of long words to get sense. The imperious voice was still awhile, because among the elders was reading aloud of the Holy Word—for the most part a confused sound to Eyloff's slow brain ; but now and then something arrested it. As in a dream he heard the words :

"He was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagle's feathers, and his nails like bird's claws."

There was a pause ; one or two heads were

turned to look at him. Then there was a laugh, and a shrill voice cried : " When are you going back, brother, to eat grass ? "

Eyloff stood up. He heard a whisper of hushed reproof : his mother saying, " Do not try to remind him of what was ! " Then, like something hardly remembered, once learned and forgotten, words came into the fool's mouth. " O God ! O God ! " he said, " I that was once a man ! "

He opened the door and went out into the night.

A moon, misty, behind cloud, looked at him. With a dull wish to get away from the sound of men's voices, he stole away and pushed for the great open downs. He had got it into his waking senses at last, that cry belonging till now only to a brief moment of illumination upon which after-doubts had settled. Now it was part of his blood, part of his brain, his breath went and came, his heart knocked to it. " I—I that was once a man ! "

His ear, keen to all natural sounds, caught hold of a soft disturbance in the night ; under the hedges were things moving, more than the night generally showed.

Almost under his feet he came upon a leveret wounded, dragging itself slowly through the undergrowth. He took it up tenderly, to see how it ailed ; but it struggled and cried to get out of his hands. At that a small pain smote its way into him, for till now there had always been fellowship between him and the beasts ; and it was their wont to recognize him at all times as one of themselves—

to come naturally to him, to feel his touch with confidence. Putting the leveret down, he watched it limping painfully on, heading for the open down.

Soon he saw that in all the hedge-shadows, and along the furrows of the ground, were things that moved, and halted, and moved again ; and they all went one way, towards the open solitudes and over the head of the down.

Under the moon in mist, like his own mind, the whole night moved with creation in pain ; all this life that he saw was sick, diseased, maimed, and wounded, a host of sufferers without a hospital ; and through the slow wonder of it, something pressed at his memory to be put into form.

As he went on, before and behind in patient motion, went a thousand-footed pain ; every four feet were the bearers of a living death, and all were making for one point, in the open and over the ridge.

He topped the ascent, and saw moonlight on a still country, all solitude ; no human dwelling to break the self-possession of the earth to the farthest the eye might scan. Away in a quiet hollow lay a gleam of still waters ; and round them, as he came to a nearer view, a great waiting company stood gathered. And all the while from folds and ribs of the surrounding country came others in long files, centring towards the one goal.

The moon grew a little clearer ; something of the shadow was also lifting from Eyloff's brain ; what form would the past take to itself out of the grey middle of this night ?

Over the water came trouble ; swept by a soft ruffling motion it silvered to the moon. From the centre a swift commotion began, as at the touch of some bird's feet alighting, thence it widened till from shore to shore it took on a shape of wings, tremulously outspread, and hovering.

The pool's surface became dark with plunging life : a cry, a sound of thanksgiving yielded itself to the cool night air. And Eyloff's brain had memory laid sharply upon it.

Even so, once he too had been there, led by the beasts among whom his outcast life of gross darkness had been passed, and, according to the measure of their sense of the miracle, healing had been wrought for him, healing for his blood, not for his brain ; and yet healing enough to unloose his tongue and make the voice of his lost past cry out of him.

The moon in mist, the twilight, the doubt remained : but his mind had taken hold of the vision of that night as he turned to go home. At his feet ran glad life, drawn fresh from the angelic troubling of those healing waters. He leaped and raced, feeling their joy in his blood. Only of himself the memory grew slow, and faded ; all but this prayer, stinging its sense into his brain : "O God ! O God ! I that was once a man ! "

Had any looked well into Eyloff's eyes in faith of some glimmering of sense, they might have seen signs of a new query thereafter taking form, searching to find for itself an answer ; a look of waiting had come to impress his face as he sat and watched

his brother, and listened to the old railing words of hatred—a painful fear lest, in its weakness, the mind should let slip from its feeble thread this one thing that it sought most to retain in memory.

For a year the brain clung fast to this, and did not let it go. So one day Eyloff came to his brother and said : " To-night is the night of healing. Come, and I will have you see the animals go down into the water for the touch that shall make them well."

The other laughed, and cried : " What ! has the fool got back wits enough to dream dreams ? "

" This is no dream," cried Eyloff ; " I saw them ! They bled, they were lame ; they went in, and they came out well. One of them was the farmer's dog that went mad, and could not be found, and came back cured : all the world knows that." The fool went on : " Up there it is beautiful, when the full moon looks out. You shall see the wind stand still in the trees, but the water will begin to move. Then they go down."

His brother said : " If, after all, you are a wizard, as some say, then I shall know, and you shall be burned ! Yes, I will go."

So, at a late hour, when others in the house slept, Eyloff lifted the cripple from his couch and carried him out into the breathless stillness of the moon-struck night. A clear orb of light showed in a disembodied firmament.

The form in Eyloff's arms was very frail ; it was more bone than flesh he held, thickly mantled and bound to keep out the cold. " Little brother,"

he said, " Cain loves you well to night : see where they all go, the poor cripples to be healed."

His brother turned to look, and saw surely, alongside, shadows moving and halting, going the same way as themselves. A cold fear began in him. Eyloff was mad,—some held that he was a wizard : what might he not do to one so weak now in his sole charge, whose hatred had been poured out on him all these years ? Superstitious fears claimed their victim. " I will not go ! " he cried. " Take me back. If you are not a wizard, take me back, I say."

Eyloff held him close. " Little brother, you shall go back when I have done with you. Then I will let you go." He began to run ; his brother struggled feebly, a prey to extreme terror.

" Oh, fool, fool ! " he cried to himself, " why did I let him bring me to this ? My God, he is going to kill me ! Cain, Cain, Cain ! " he shrieked in agony, " I love you : let me go ! "

The idiot heard with a dull, sweet sense of pleasure. " Little brother will love me, I know. Soon he shall not call me Cain any more ; it shall be Eyloff then."

" Eyloff ! I love you, Eyloff ! " came the pitiful whimper of fear, all the way over the down. But the other seemed scarcely to hear it.

He crested the ridge, and saw below the quiet water ; and all the tribes of fur stood by the margin waiting. At the sound of a human tread a skurry of panic took them ; but when they saw only Eyloff

carrying his burden they returned to their watch by the brink. Eyloff came down and stood in their midst.

The cripple gazed round in terror to see wild and tame so herded together by some power invisible and unknown. "Eyloff," he whined, "have pity on me! Let me go!"

A sound smote upon the water; over its surface a troubled movement began, and spread, till from shore to shore rested a form of outstretched wings. Eyloff and all the beasts stepped down together.

Suddenly the cripple felt a horror of cold strike through him: water had him by the waist, the breast, the throat! "Cain!" he cried, and struggling desperately, struck with all his force.

Eyloff felt the blow. It was no weakling's push; it came hard and strong. He stumbled and fell, plunging deep.

"O God! O God! I that was once a man!"

How clear a light rayed down to him from the moon when he rose up to the surface once more, and knew himself a sound man; and saw by his side a small lithe body shaken with passion, that struck at him again and again, fiercely, wildly, and would not stay.

"Cain! Cain! Cain!"

His brother broke away from his hands; wading and stumbling, he gained the dry margin of the pool, and ran.

"You are a wizard!" he cried. "Now for your devil's magic see if I do not have you burned alive!"

But Eyloff cared little for words then, as in deep thankfulness he knelt down by the healing waters and thanked God who had loosed him from his brother's reproach.

In the first days that followed a strange tale grew in people's ears. Eyloff found himself under a ban ; neighbours who had pitied him mad, passed him now with crooked thumbs, avoiding him or maintaining a respectful distance. This was said : The madness that had made him for years harmless had gone—indeed, the fact was apparent to all—and with the return of health had come the murderous instinct, so that only by a miracle had his brother escaped the devil's plot made against his life. It was a clumsy story, but it served ; and the restored cripple had miracle to help him in getting others to believe what his own hatred and fear made truth to him.

Dumbfoundered and amazed, Eyloff listened to accusation wherein his brother's voice led all the rest. Justify himself he could not ; nothing could he tell and get believed, of knowledge that had crept into him in days when twilight was upon his brain. For all that—his kind fellowship and understanding with the beasts—" wizard " was the word.

But the thing that struck deepest, that seemed almost to smite the love of God out of his heart, was his brother's hatred of himself, and one thing else—the dread of a growing knowledge, from which he shrank, trying not to see.

His ear became a-start for sounds that made him

run,—at first to deny himself the possibility of belief that the darling recovery of life should take on so hideous a form ; and then from that to certainty, and so, instead of flight, a rush to succour.

Now had come back to him in full horror the memory of the day when his twilight became coloured with blood, and darkness hung ready to fall : the day when he ran back to the wood carrying the little fox-cub—and how it still lived—just lived. And now more and more this grew to be the burden of his days : " O God ! O God ! this that I made into a man ! "

Once beyond control, his hand went up for a blow, and stayed as the jeer, " Strike, Cain ! " reached home to his heart.

" God forbid ! " he said. " I pray that before that shall happen, you or I may have found mercy of God ! "

Mercy of God ! It became his prayer, that his brother, whom he had let loose on the world, might die without his aid. And yet love that he could not undo, for pity, for compassion, for allowance, on a caged youth that had so grown warped, wove itself with his heart and would not let him go.

All that first year of restored health seemed to him an age in purgatory. A day drew near that knocked at his heart with accumulations of tenderness : the day when the maimed beasts went to be healed. There would be many, he knew, that must go this year to get help.

" Now surely," he thought, " if I bid him come

and see the heavenly deed done, and remember how his own healing was wrought, some ruth and sorrow will find its way into his heart at last ! "

So, on the day, he said : " To-night, brother, is the night of our salvation. Come with me, and see how God will raise up and comfort those weak ones whom you and I have wronged."

His brother laughed. " You feign madness well. Do you seek to kill me there again ? "

" Not so ! " cried Eyloff. " This is God's truth ; to-night, for one night at least, the world that suffers much because of you, will suffer less. Come and see, that you may learn mercy ! "

But the other only cried, " Wizard ! " and broke from him with an oath.

So in deep contrition Eyloff rose up that night to go alone and beg forgiveness for the scourge he had let loose on his foster-kin. As he stole out from the sleep of others, he was moved to see if his brother might not at the last be persuaded to come and gain grace at sight of the angelic healing.

An empty room ! His heart stopped to see that the bed had not been lain in. Quickly he made his way into the quiet night.

From the broad stillness without there came a sound : the wind that had drawn in its breath let it go in a cry. It seemed to Eyloff the voice of Earth in travail for her kind.

Fear caught up his feet and he ran. Under the loving-kindness of this night of stars, through which even now the Angel might seem to be descending

to lay on one spot of earth the divine gift of healing —another ministry was already at work.

His heart froze, for he passed things too feeble to move, and their heads were all toward that place whence healing should come. That way with all speed he followed.

He came to a place of cries. There was no need for him to run any more ; there, what he sought, he found.

" O God," he cried, " take back the gifts ! " And with his full strength he struck and did not stay his hand.

A moan fetched pity from the far back of his heart ; and looking, he saw mercy restored again to earth ; then over his brain dim twilight and darkness came hovering.

Very tenderly he stooped, and lifted a small twisted cripple in his arms, and all the way carried him with witless words of love. And the other gazed up at him with a conscious face and did not rail or cry.

So at the door of their home he laid one whom he seemed barely to know : for the lips had in them no bitterness, and the eyes no hatred. Then, when he had loosed his burden, on himself fell the great darkness, and blotted him once more and for ever from the ways of men.

After that night there lived two brothers, not released by death for many a year : one a cripple, who lay still and made no claim ; and the other a wanderer in wild places untrodden by men, most loved of all the beasts.

The Heart of the Sea

A FISHERMAN came to the priest's cell, which lay rock-hewn above the chapel on the headland. "Father," said he, "come down with me, and bless my nets; for 'twill be three days now that I have caught nothing."

"Nay, is it not more?" replied the priest, as he rose: and, laying his hand on the fellow's arm, he could feel how want and misery had made a skeleton of the strong man.

"That was before I confessed," muttered the other. "One doesn't let that count." And together they went down the rocks seawards. From the chapel to the sea's edge went a stair cut into the steep rock, worn by the tides and slippery with weed: below lay the boat moored.

The fisherman drew the boat up to the steps, and the priest embarked; silently they rowed off through the quiet lapping waters of the bay, under the mist of a faintly-starred night.

"Where has your fishing been the three days?" asked the priest at last.

"Among my own grounds," answered the fisherman; "under the deep rocks. The other men will not have me now: they are saying I bring ill-luck."

After an hour's rowing, his stroke slowed over blackened waters; for there the line might drop many fathoms and find no bottom, and all away round huge walls of rock threw down their shade. The oars ceased.

"Wait awhile, Father," said the fisherman, "and watch; there is a sign that comes." They leaned together over the side of the boat and watched.

"Three nights there has been a sign," the man went on. Under them the water was very still. "Do you see there?" He pointed: the untaught eyes of the priest could see nothing. "Down below there," said the other, "are shoals and shoals; but I let down my nets and catch nothing."

"Is that the sign?" asked the priest.

"No. They are rich grounds; they were my father's, and his father's before him. That is not the sign: to see fish here is nothing. There it is!"

The even noise of the water was broken by three pricks of sound: one after another three bubbles came up under the gunwale of the boat, and burst —so close that had either reached down a finger they could have touched them on the surface as they broke.

"It is the same!" said the fisherman.

"That only?"

"And when I let down my nets I catch nothing."

"Three days ago," asked the priest, "you confessed all?"

"All but a sort of fear I have," answered the other. "Father, can the soul of a babe unborn perish?"

"It is in God's hands," was the reply. "We poor sinners can but repent, and hope God will be pitiful."

THE HEART OF THE SEA

Then the priest made the sign of the Cross over the water ; and said he, " On this side, let down your nets as far as they will go." The priest knelt and prayed, while hand over hand the fisherman passed out long lengths of net, till all were let down.

" Draw in ! " called the priest. The other obeyed.

" Father," said he, presently, " there is something here." In came snaky skeins of net, dark and swabby from the brine ; but there was not sign of tail or fin to be seen.

" Still, there is something," said the fisherman : " I feel it coming." He hauled in the last lengths ; in their midst was something small that showed palely in the gloom. He reached down his hands, and took up in them a new-born man-child, naked, and cold, and wet from the salt sea.

" Ah, my God ! " cried the fisherman, and his limbs shook with fright. " Take it from me, I cannot hold it ! " The priest, taking it, found it stone-cold to his touch ; yet there were in it signs of life.

He drew up a little sea-water in the hollow of his hand, and speaking in haste, " Fisherman," said he, " what name shall I give to your child ? "

The fisherman crouched himself in the bottom of the boat. " No name, no name, O Lord ! " he clamoured. " Christen it and have done, and throw it back to the fishes ! "

The priest, pouring the sea-water over the babe's forehead, said, " Babe, I baptize thee, in the name

of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost." And at that its voice woke in a little cry like a sea-mew's ; and the fisherman, hearing, prayed that it might be thrown back into the sea.

The priest wrapped the child in his cloak and laid it to warm against his breast. Then he said to the other, " Now, again, let down your net into the sea." The fisherman obeyed trembling ; only he said, below his breath, " Not another, O Lord, or I leap out of the boat ! "

But soon, as he began to draw up the net, he laughed to feel its weight, and to see how hundreds went hither and thither darting in its midst. He rowed back to land, rich with a single haul, and at the chapel-rock he and the priest parted. " Father," said he then, " have pity on me, for I fear to take the child, though it be mine. All else you bid me I will do ; but if it needs must be reared, do you rear it, for in truth that is beyond me."

So the priest took the child with him to his cell, and, bringing a goat to suckle it, cared for it as tenderly as though it had been his own. And, as time went on, 'twixt love and fear, he watched how strangely it grew, and wondered of what life it was.

Terrible was its fear of the sea, and of dreams where the feared thing cannot be kept away. Yet sea-gulls came to its call, and, as the child grew, began to make their nests in the carved clefts of the chapel-rock looking seaward, and over the lintel of the priest's cell, so that presently from the sea

the chapel-rock stood out white on the dark headland, because of the birds that made it their home.

As the boy grew he went by the name the priest had given him in baptism ; even when he became a man he was " Babe " still to all that spoke of him. He was slow of speech and slow to learn, and all the use of life for him seemed to be to sit at the priest's door by the chapel on the lonely headland, and to gaze out over all weathers through the clustering of white gulls.

All the gentleness and thoughtfulness of his nature seemed fitting him for a life of religion and seclusion ; therefore the priest trained him in the fear and knowledge of God, and in love and pity for all things that had life. And after his twentieth year he became a priest, so that when his foster-father died he might succeed him in his holy office.

Of his parentage he but just knew. " Who," he had said, " is the fisherman who rows up to the steps, and leaves fish and fruit for us, but never comes up to the door, and if he sees me, looks at me in fear ? "

" He is your father, Babe," the priest had answered. " And who," asked Babe, " is my mother ? " The priest told him her name. " She," he said, " was lost in the sea : none saw her die." This was before Babe went away to be trained for the priesthood.

As soon as Babe was made priest he came back to the chapel-rock, for his foster-father was already becoming old and infirm : and now often could

not say his daily Mass in the chapel on the headland, which was there that Masses might be said for the souls of those lost at sea.

When Babe came there and sang his first Mass, his foster-father asked him : "What was your intention in saying your Mass?" And Babe answered : "I said it for those that live under the sea." But more than that, or his reason for that, he did not know. His foster-father said : "All the while behind us there was a sound of wings, and of sea-water without."

No long time after the old priest died and was laid in the burial-ground above the chapel, among all the drowned bodies of the men for whose souls his life has been spent in prayer. Then Babe remained alone to sing Mass in the rock-chapel below.

Fishermen who passed by, or came to kneel in the door seeing that Mass was being said, told how all within the chapel was white with the clustering of gulls, and how from beginning to end they kept silent, nor ever lifted a wing before the time was to go. So the story began that he was a saint, and that God had shown it to the birds ; and presently people came and besought his prayers when trouble and heavy misfortune was upon them. And all reckoned that his word did good.

Only the one fisherman who feared him, feared him not less, and came and went, never going nearer than the foot of the steps in the chapel-rock to leave offerings of bread or fish. But a time came,

and his offerings had to cease ; and the other fishermen said : " The evil luck is on you again ; go up to the sea-chapel and bid the priest bless your fishing : and until you get his blessing do not work with us ! "

For a long while he waited, hoping to find a turn in his luck come ; but at last famine and fear drove him, and he went.

He found Babe praying before the altar ; and he, as soon as he turned and saw who was there, stretched out his hands, crying : " I have waited long for your coming, father ! "

The fisherman, confounded and astonished to find himself known, " I have been an ill father," said he ; " from the beginning I was that ; for I was for throwing you back into the sea when you came out of it." And to Babe's question he laid bare all the story of his birth out of the sea, and the night under the dark rocks. " And now again," said he, " luck is gone from my fishing, and last night once more came the sign."

Together without more words they went down into the boat, and the fisherman rowed his son through the closing night to the place of deep water under the rocks. And as they leaned over the boatside, and looked into the dead calm, up came the three bubbles, and broke in three small sighs.

Then Babe, making over it the sign of the Cross, bade let down the net as far as it might go. After he had hauled some while : " There is weight

here ! " said the fisherman ; and all the while Babe ceased not to pray.

Up to the boatside came a white form, young, and fair, and dead : a woman clothed in strange sea-weeds, and with long yellow hair going down to her feet. The fisherman, seeing her come, shrieked and wailed, and fell down babbling for fear : therefore Babe himself lifted his fair young mother's body over the boatside. For the deep-sea life to her flesh had been but as a day ; and for all the years of her bondage, she was to the eye as on the day when her lover's faithlessness had made her go there to seek death.

All the way back the fisherman sat and yammered on the farthest thwart of the boat, making circles with his eyes, while his son rowed. And at the chapel-rock, the priest only, lifting her, bore her up to the little graveyard on the headland, where lay the cast-up bodies of drowned fishing folk.

The old fisherman followed him like a babe, and watched all he did with a witless smile. And not long before dawn they two came down into the chapel, and there, for his mother's soul, Babe began to sing Mass.

All the gulls roused up from their nests in the crannies without, and came flocking in. " Little son, little son," called the old man, " see the white birds that have come to hear you say Mass ! " But Babe heeded not, and went on.

Presently there was a soft hustling sound in the chapel, and again the old man laughed, and cried :

"Little son, little son, see the blue men who have come to hear you sing Mass!" But Babe, as if not heeding the words, went on.

"Little son, little son," cried the old man once more, "the blue men weep as they hear you sing Mass!" But it was the time of the elevation of the Host, and without pausing the priest went on.

Presently he came to the words of the dismissal, "Ite, missa est!" and there was a sound of withdrawn sobs, and overhead the rush of sea-mews' wings departing. "Little son, little son," cried the old man, "the blue men are gone!" His son turned and came down from the altar. All the floor was wet and salt as a rock over which the tide has ebbed down.

"Little son, little son," cried the fisherman, "you look old!"

"Father," said Babe, "now take me back in your boat to the place of deep water under the rocks; to the place whence I came: the place whither you would have had me return."

The old man gabbled and laughed: so soft was he of brain he had no fear now. So together they rowed to the fishing-ground beneath the high rocks.

Then Babe stripped himself as a diver, and stood up shuddering in the boat. "Kiss me, father," said he, "and when you go home ask others to cherish you in your old age. But they that live under the sea have none to cherish them, or to teach them the word of Life."

He looked fearfully down into the sea he dreaded;

yet he knew that he had in him the sea-life, and that far down under the waves sea-speech would rise up to his lips—a gift that had not been given to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost.

The fisherman laughed and said: "How you talk for a new-born babe! Rock, cradle, rock!" And he swayed the boat from side to side. Presently he was alone, and passing his hand over his eyes: "Ah, ah!" he went on, "I said to the priest, 'Throw it overboard!' Has the priest gone too?" And he took up the oars and rowed home.

For many days the rock-chapel was empty; till, one night of wind and roaring water, up came the sea. It filled the chapel, and dashed the mews out of their crannies, and broke the cross over the altar, and made all that was there a ruin.

At dawn the waters went down, and there lay on the floor of the chapel a fair youth, with hands and feet pierced, and crowned with a crown of sharp coral, the image of one crucified for the love of Him whom he had been down to preach in the depths of the sea.

The House of Rimmon

WHEN the final red blast of persecution had swept over the islands, leaving only the bare bones of the new faith to bleach under the ashes of its temples, Koshi rose up out of his hiding, a lonely man.

He had been a priest of the old idol-worship, but his heart of perfect kindliness and charity had made him a mild convert to the better doctrine. Before the first trial of his convictions came, he could have sworn that none loved better, or would suffer more gladly to maintain, a creed based upon an ideal of world-wide compassion and charity. But at the first sight of a martyr's blood his courage had spilled out of him ; and he prayed to his old gods to clear his wits of the new and perilous convictions that had mastered them.

In spite of his prayers, he remained an oozy unreclaimed swamp of remorse and Christian conviction. The heavy load of belief would not let him go : hiding from the voice of conscience that called him to a violent death, he became in time the one surviving unslaughtered Christian of his race.

It was a curious pang to him, with his inherited instincts of respect for family remains, that he dared not gather up the small bones of his own children and bury them. They had not paddled in the Rubicon, but had gone boldly in beyond their depth or his, away from the timorous wringing of his hands.

Gaunt with hunger, in an abasement of moral misery, he returned by stealth to the scorched scene of devastation which had once been his home ; and was there presently found by the messengers of the Inquisition, beating out the old ritual for dear safety in front of his idol Rimmon, in the house which had before been the scene of his priestly vocation.

At the threshold, assuring himself of solitude, he had uttered his last prayer of integrity : " When I bow myself in the House of Rimmon, the Lord pardon Thy servant in this thing ! " He waited hoping for a sign of divine acquiescence ; receiving none, he sighed heavily, and entering, bowed himself low. Rimmon was not his god's name originally : but, as a parable to his wretched soul, he so christened it, and began thenceforward to refit his abject life to the remembered ritual.

The prime movers of the redominant paganism, glutted with the blood of so many, viewed him askance, but let him be : priests of the old order were not so plentiful in the land that they could well spare him, an accredited ministrant in the ritual of the ancient worship.

Under the infliction of this obliquely directed worship Rimmon sat placable—hands to lap, eyes moodily drooping : wondering apparently where had gone a missing forefinger, the one lopping of his hard adamantine embodiment achieved by the fanaticism of the upstart faith during its temporary ascendancy.

Koshi, then, overborne by the paganism with-

out, resumed his priestly office and appellation ; but to his privacy, opening the secret thoughts of a heart convicted of spiritual leprosy, he styled himself by the name that seemed to go best with his return to superstition, nourishing some hopes of a final reconciliation and cleansing for his conscience, by bestowing on himself the name of Naaman.

He made it a signal of his abasement to be punctilious in all the observances his office required. Morning and evening he brought bread and fruit, and laid them at the foot of his idol ; and as he waited for them to moulder and decay before partaking in a fasting spirit, all the while prayer to a denied Deity strove within him.

He was one whom accustomed ritual drew as a magnet the needle ; scared, he found himself addressing reflections of a Christian character to the imperturbable stone. In his released hours intelligence made him aware that the old superstitions were exploded for him for ever, that hand-hewn granite had its limitations excluding godhead ; but when his body bowed, virtue or aspiration went out that he could not battle. Presently half involuntarily a transference took place : his shy cowardice caught at courage : with meek heterodoxy he attached divine attributes to Rimmon,—and was off, in a very ecstasy of prayer.

Before long a strange uplifting took place in him. His face, no longer bowed under shadow of his cowl as he walked abroad, shone so that passers-by noticed it. People said the light of

his god's countenance rested on Koshi ; to one so favoured they brought their prayers.

Koshi prayed for them. Outwardly, to such as had contact with him, he was become a pattern of all lovableness. A benign atmosphere was settling down over the village, and beyond to a radius of which the House of Rimmon formed the centre. Prayer found answer. From day to day Koshi's mere personal influence had more and more the weight of lawgiving attached to it.

Something so beautiful and unquarrelsome infected the life of the local community, that the suspicion of a revival in Christianity brought about a pounding down of the Inquisitors. They found, on the contrary, the House of Rimmon exquisitely garnished, thronged devoutly on all high days with worshippers. Rimmon had never so flourished.

About this time there came a drought. Koshi, held down just then on a sick-bed of fever, heard, as his delirium passed away, the moans of a stricken multitude, sick people and much cattle. The heads of the community had been tenderly waiting on him, reserving for his use the only trickle of pure water that could be got. They were anxious for him to get well, loving him,—also that he should go down to the House of Rimmon and, praying away the plague, get rain for them.

Koshi put off death, and rising up, a miracle of weakness, tottered to the House of Rimmon ; there he prayed with closed doors. Many times through that day and the night following his feebleness made

body and brain sink with exhaustion : but he would not let Rimmon's feet go.

Lifting up failing eyes, but with an unconquered spirit, under the arid blast of the second noon that smote in even to the darkness of that sanctuary, Koshi beheld with a squirm of horror the gentle, indolent palm of Rimmon go up and cross the air with a sign of blessing.

Outside came the crash of rain. Koshi lay bowed till the deluge washed in over the paved court, reaching his feet. The thanksgiving villagers, daring to break in after many hours, found him but one remove from a corpse. Borne back to his bed, all day he felt his feet kissed by a procession of pilgrims, and heard rain rushing : perpetually, to his mind's eye, drawn down by the hand of Rimmon lifted in the act of blessing.

His recovery, bringing him fearfully once more to the temple precincts, let him see Rimmon only as before, placid and indolent, with hands patiently resting in lap. But now his fame was established through all the country, and stretched from island to island.

Perpetual pilgrimages enriched the shrine ; gold and jewellery were showered in refinement of the stern granite ; mercenary appeals were made to the priest to secure the favourable ear of his god.

But Koshi, by no law forbidden from sharing in the god's prosperity, remained poor. Men, bewildered, cast about in their minds ; and being sure of Koshi's sanctity, came to hallow the eccentircity. He meanwhile had ever before his gaze the wonder

of Rimmon's uplifted hand. That he had seen !

Before final old age took him, Koshi, dreamily pursuing the vision which beckoned him, had re-established half the Christian virtues in an unmeaning prominence. When his time grew short, beginning to have visions of things definite and of near approach, he justified to himself the use of a parable. Calling the chief magistrates of the archipelago together, he told of a strange dream he had dreamed :—how, at the dead of night, jealous of Rimmon's honours, all the other gods had risen up and come to Rimmon's house, loading him with abuse and stripes. Rimmon, however, was too good to complain.

" It is but a dream ! " he said, when they insisted on going to Rimmon's house to make reparation to the god who had become so lovable in their midst. They found his back of black granite grievously scarred, as though outrageous whips of superhuman employ had been laid across it.

Amazed at the sight of that miracle confirming his fable, Koshi caught his breath and dreamed, to greater effect.

Once more at dead of night the gods had come, and for fear and jealousy made assault on one who, contrary to the godliness of paganism, made peace the halo of his abode. " I dreamed," cried Koshi, " that they haled him as a malefactor to death, wounding his hands and feet ! "

They all ran in gentle trepidation to the temple and it was so : Rimmon's body had on it the sacred

signs of martyrdom. Within twenty-four hours Rimmon was the only idol of stone that stood up whole and sound over the length and breadth of that land. At a single blow the islanders had fallen back upon monotheism.

A mortal weakness of love took hold of Koshi; for three years he laboured, instilling the love of Rimmon into the hearts of all. Now that other gods were expelled, Rimmon was unfolding himself.

One day Koshi dreamed again, and said: "Behold, in a while, a greater than Rimmon draws nigh, before whom Rimmon himself must give way and pass out of men's hearts."

The people lifted up their voices and wailed at such tidings; they wanted no greater god than this one, so beneficent to their needs. "Rimmon himself," said Koshi, "will give the signal of his own departure, and stretch out the hand of welcome."

It was not long after this that, one day at sunrising, the earth shook and trembled as Rimmon stood up on his feet, and going through the door of his temple, turned his face seawards.

Koshi lifted hands of thanksgiving. "Look!" he cried, "it is the beginning of the sign which I foretold: there he goes with the hand of welcome! All you who are able, rise up and follow to see him depart!"

At his word the people rose up with wailing to follow the footsteps of the departing deity. To this day those footsteps are seen in prints that point seaward and do not return. Only Koshi, the aged priest, remained alone to his inland seclusion.

Solemnly and thundrously Rimmon trod down a day's journey towards the coast. There came a ship over the sea's rim, outlandishly rigged ; and Koshi, with seeing heart, knew that in it returned the compassionate faith whose way he and Rimmon had prepared and made straight.

Rimmon came down to the water's edge, and stayed not his goings there ; on he went into deeper and deeper flood to meet the nearing sail. First the sea took him by the foot, then by the knees, and then by the waist. "The sign, the sign !" cried the multitude. "Yonder goes Rimmon to bring us to the sign we welcome !"

Soon the water had taken Rimmon so high as to his armpits ; presently it took him by the throat. The ship was quite near ; in the prow stood one holding a crozier, making signs of exorcism toward the formidable portent that approached. All the crew trembled and shrank at the sight, crying, "Slay him, or we perish !"

The Prelate made the sign of the Cross despairingly in the biggest possible size. Rimmon bowed his head into the waves, and reached up a hand. A shout of applause and welcome sounded from the strand : he was seen no more. The ship and the croziered pilot came on.

And meanwhile Koshi, knowing these things in a dream, rose up feebly from his bed, and going timidly to a place of ruins, gathered together the dust of certain small bones, and lay down with them in the House of Rimmon to die.

When Pan was Dead

IN the woods that muffled the convent's walls spring was letting herself show. Wherever the search went, life was to be found pushing life through the moist soil, or thrusting green horns through last year's bark of trees. A gentle desire of life, half infantile, half marital, was beginning to be abroad ; and nature felt the suckling's becoming the wooer's request.

The woodling looked out, blinking the long winter-sleep from her eyes : all the fibres and dead leaves and ferns, in which she had wrapped herself chrysalis-wise, she peeled off, and, lying down, rolled her clear brown skin over the newly carpeted earth.

She went up like a squirrel into a tree, and, perching from bough to bough, searched in the clefts and crannies for food.

The chatterers cried as she went, " Here is the woodling, she is after our nuts ! " They pelted her with hard cones and husks that were not good to eat. She laughed mockingly, and gave chase, till at length, tiring of the frolic, she swung herself to earth, and made through the thick underwood toward a noise of waters running in the hollow below.

All day she made the round of her haunts, searching for her own kind ; but now she was the only woodling left of the tribes there had used to be. For here and there she chanced upon a sight that

made her turn quickly away—of something lying quiet in a cleft of ground, or under a hollow of roots, like a large brown chrysalis without any sign of life : and she knew that whatever had not stirred then, from its winter-sleep, would stir in the world no more.

For all those wood-mates of hers she had a vague love : she could not remember one from other, and yet they had all been dear. And now she felt a new hunger for companionship rise in her heart ; and her love of those who had turned to root became cruel and sad.

Deep twilight shadows gathered up the slopes of the wood : soon the birds and squirrels went in to sleep, leaving her lonely. She stood still, stretching out her two arms, and sighed.

Down from the heights, where the convent was, came the sound of the Angelus-bell, giving its domestic tinkle to the small sisterhood of nuns. Up there, pale lights shone from the chapel and the barred windows of the cells. Therein went the life of comradeship : but the little woodling was all alone. The woods pressed up to the very walls, and shadowed every window with a fondling of boughs : under their shelter the woodling crept near while the twilight drew in, and stopped to listen and look.

From within came the clatter of a pail, and the sound of washing over stone floors. Presently the lay-sister appeared at the door to empty away the water ; the woodling from behind her

WHEN PAN WAS DEAD

tree could have reached out an arm and touched her. The lay-sister lifted a long breath, and sighed it out again. "Oh, me!" she said, "oh, poor sad me!" and she picked three little blades of young grass, and laid them to her lips. "When will these be growing over me?" she murmured, letting them fall for pure listlessness and grief. Then she went in and barred up the door; and the other remained alone.

"Why is she so sad, when she has with her so many of her own kind?" thought the woodling. "Now I am sad, having none."

She lingered without the walls, hearing the sounds of life inside: presently meal and prayer were over, and all was the silence of rest. Then from the window of the little cell guarding the door came a voice. "Oh, me! Oh, weary me!" and a sound of tears. It was the lay-sister crying herself to sleep.

The woodling climbed a long bough, and looked in: all was dark, she could see nothing: there was sobbing. "Oh, me! Oh, weary me!" came a sigh out of the darkness. The woodling slipt her small thin body between the bars, and crept into the cell. And then, all at once, her heart sank very low, as for the first time she left free wood and sky, and, entering an abode built by man born to sorrow, felt the shades of his prison-house fall upon her.

Uncomprehending compassion took hold of her: "Sister," she said, "do you know me? I am

from the wood: I heard you crying, so I came."

In the darkness and half asleep, the lay-sister said nothing; only she heard a sweet voice, and presently felt the soft arms and warm breath of one sharing her hard couch. "Are you the woodman's daughter?" she murmured. "Yes," answered the woodling: but they did not mean the same thing: and the lay-sister, thinking she had by her side only a woodman's daughter who had strayed late, thought no more, but dropped into a weary slumber.

All that night she slept without waking, but never did she wake again to be as before: for all night the blood of the woodling had tingled against her side, and warmed her in her sleep, and put colour into her pale dreams.

When she woke the woodman's daughter was gone; only in the place where she had lain were a few buds of the wild yellow crocus.

The woodling, watching from her form in the undergrowth, saw the lay-sister open the convent doors and windows, and let in the sun. The sunlit woods made her gaze and gaze: she could not go on with her work.

"I have given her the wood-dream!" said the tree-born to herself: "Soon I shall have a companion, and shall not be lonely any more."

At night, after all was still, she crept in again to the lay-sister's cell; and finding her fast asleep, lay down by her side and let her dream. Again

she was up and gone, before the other awoke.

The lay-sister went to and fro all day in a dream ; first it was the voice of the woods, the sunlight, and the air, that called to her ; but beyond, and more than these, she heard life—kind human voices, and the laughter of children, and the hum of the housewife's wheel : because the wood-dream had taught her the joy of living ; and all that the little woodling wished for was but a half-way house left far behind.

So, the third night when the woodling climbed in through the window, she found no one on the bed, but only a heap of nun's garments lying, and the lay-sister gone. Though she went out and searched through the wood no comrade was waiting for her there. The one she had thought to win was gone far out to the ways of men : the little woodling had taught her too much.

She went back into the cell, where as in a tomb the white garments were lying folded, and wept, for she was companionless. Then she thought, " Since she has gone away there is room here for me. I will be in her place, and will teach them to be happy ! "

She put on the habit, and at dawn opened the convent doors. She knew that the lay-sister was the only one who went and came, and that all the other nuns were close prisoners, never to go forth at all. Now she went curiously from place to place : much of the life she had already learned from

looking in through the wood-bowered windows : but the tiny chapel through its windows of thick glass she had never seen.

When she entered she heard from behind the grill by the altar the thin, gnat-like wail of the nuns at their early prayers : a monotonous note of feeble pain, as though all were shut in and were trying to get out, but could not.

" I will teach them how to be happy ! " said the little woodling.

There she saw by the altar the Figure of Pain : and first she believed it truly to be a man, suffering in agony. She ran to pull off the thorns, and draw out the nails, but could not, and found at last that what she handled was not truth but deceit. She saw before it, offerings of flowers and candles, and her heart sank very low. " Why," she asked, " why do they love *pain* ? Ah, I will teach them to be happy ! "

The nuns, whose Rule made them always keep their eyes on the ground, never saw that their lay-sister was not the same. She went and came, bringing food for the convent, and carrying up water from the stream. When the days grew longer and the spring-woods brighter,—" Soon," she thought, " I will make them come out with me into the woods." She brought roots of sweet relish that only she knew how to find, and added to the convent's meals ; and at night, when all were asleep, she crept from cell to cell, and gave them the wood-dream that should make them

happy. Presently she looked for laughter ; and behold, tears !

A terrible restlessness and grief seemed to weigh upon all the nuns : all day long they prayed, and beat their little breasts, and sighed.

But the woodling day by day, hoping to make her work complete, brought more and more of the wood-life within the sacred walls. Up between the stone flags of the chapel and the passages where her feet passed came bluebells of slender colour in the shade ; creepers trailed and climbed the walls, and the whole inner place was sweet and fragrant with things that grew.

" Soon," thought the woodman's daughter, " my sisters will learn where their hearts mean them to be ! "

Alas, for their hearts ! The sweetness of life was causing them to break. One day the gentle Abbess called all the nuns together, and said : " Sisters, I cannot fail to know how much grief and suffering is upon you all ; on me also it falls. Our hearts are weighed down under a sweet and heavy temptation. Doubt not, it is for our sins we suffer thus—living too easily, and pampering too much the bodies God has given us to despise. Therefore by all, I make order, that penance and hard discipline are to be used, till we feel our hearts made whole in us again, and our prayers a pleasant savour to God."

The little lay-sister could not know what this meant, but presently she heard.

"Oh!" she wept, as the sounds came out of the cells, "how hard it is to teach mortals to be happy against their will, while they worship Pain!" She shuddered, as if her own flesh felt the scourgings which the poor nuns were putting upon their bodies. Then she waited no more, but ran down into the wood where the mandrakes grew.

"They will cry," she moaned; "ah, how they will cry! But my poor sisters must be made happy; I must do it!" One by one she caught them, and drew them out of the ground; and the mandrakes groaned and shrieked, as their roots came to the light of day.

The woodling ran back to the convent, and made haste to prepare the evening meal. All the nuns came in worn with pain; but a little peace had found its way into their faces. They ate the dry bread and the bitter roots that the lay-sister set before them; and then they went to their cells and lay down to sleep.

The woodling laughed, and threw off her habit, and stood up in only her brown woodland skin, and long flowing hair. The air of the early summer night was soft, and she opened wide the convent door to the light of the moon.

Presently, for the root of mandrake had done its work, one of the cell-doors slid open, and one fair nun ran out naked and silvery into the moonlight.

Another, and another; the little lay-sister counted twelve; they were all away, following

the wood-dream and the mandrake's cry ; and the convent was deserted.

The woodling clapped her hands and ran out. " I have peopled my woods again ! " she laughed ; and saw from tree to tree the gleam of their nymph-like bodies go by.

Soon the woods rang with beautiful mænad laughter ; and the stream had bathers under its banks. The fair sisterhood knew nothing of themselves ; only, because of the mandrake, their blood worked in them to madness ; and they danced, and laughed, and sang, throwing up their arms to the moon. The thin brown woodling leapt in and out of their midst, kissing them all. She said in her cruel, kind little heart, " Have I not made them happy now ? "

It grew near to the hour of dawn, as all together they came to where, in a hollow between two hills, the ground was clear of trees. From slope to slope a long swathe of mist lay hiding the ground below ; overhead the light came shyly through soft unfastenings of the dusk ; very slowly the air paled, unclothing a mute world.

Over the valley the white mist spread a floor at their feet. Down below there went a faint tinkling sound ; the sisters looked from one to the other, trying to remember where and why they had ever heard a bell before. Soon, up through the mist, like swimmers in a sea, came the pale fronts of a flock of sheep, and the head of a shepherd driving them.

He saw, standing above cloud, twelve pale women, who whitened from head to foot as they gazed at him, and one brown. The brown one laughed, and sprang like a squirrel to a tree ; but the white ones lifted their arms with a lamentable cry, and then, like driven deer, broke and scattered back under cover of the wood. For the dawn had come, and the mandrake poison had finished its work, leaving only shame and horror.

When the shepherd had gone by, the woodling came down from her tree and began searching for her fellows : but even she, searching by all the wood-ways, found none,—so deep in had they hidden themselves with their grief. Weeping she turned, and went back to the convent, that stood lonely with wide doors. " Never can I teach them to be happy," she said, " for they love Pain ! "

Then she went into the chapel, and rang loud the bell of the early Angelus. One by one, as the familiar sound reached their ears, they remembered where and why they had heard the bell before, and they crept back again by stealth into the home that was their own. And there they put on once more the habit they had thrown by in one mid-summer night's madness, when the spirit of the woods was in their blood. And when they came, sad and shamed, to the refectory at the call of meal, there indeed they found bread and water all laid for them, for every one in her right place ; but their little lay-sister was gone.

She went down to the mandrake bed, and dropped

her face into the torn soil. "These were my sisters," she said, "my dead sisters, my wood-sisters, whose rooted hearts I made bleed!"

So she lay and moaned, watering the earth with her tears.

All the mandrakes that were left were awake, and they heard her. "Come down!" they called from below, "come down, sister, to our soft bed! For here we do not know what goes on on the earth in the eye of day: only we cry if we are brought back to the light. Come down, and do not cry!"

So, after a while the woodling was drawn down by the weight of her own tears into the ground, and became a mandrake-root, as these her sisters were. There she sleeps to this day; but if anyone came and drew out that mandrake, all the convent up on the hill would hear it cry.

Damien, the Worshipper

WHEREVER great products of art and industry have united to form their stronghold in rich soil and places opportune for commerce, there, it may be guessed, the ploughshare of Time has already furrowed deeply, and the ground been more than once smoothed for changes of crop suited to conditions which have brought to each new age the yield of a particular harvest. So it was with the abbey city of Ambray whose resolute growth round the great central granary did not altogether obliterate traces of an earlier tillage in classic times. Here and there from the grey Gothic ramparts projected pieces of old carving, wallflowers grown weed-like in their decay and clinging still with pathetic constancy to the home whose inner shelter was denied to them. There were parts indeed where the old order still stood intact though put to debased uses, notably on the wall near the sheep-gate, as that one was called by which the road led in from a broad rolling plain, whence, from so far away, innumerable sheep-bells could be heard punctuating the stillness and solitude of the pastoral life.

Just there a small circular shrine or temple, flanked by delicate Corinthian columns and supporting a low conical roof, was perched toy-like on a natural spur of rock across the breadth of the defending masonry, too high from an outside view to lend weakness to the fortification ; while on the inner side a narrow flight of stairs tumbled from

its ruinous threshold to the rear angle of the deeply-echoing archway.

Here on days of festival, at the time when our story opens, an image-seller was to be seen offering for sale coloured figures of the Madonna, and of St. Agnes, the patron saint of that city, as well as of the whole sheep-breeding district.

In the centre of the town, on the highest ground of all, gaunt of stature and straight-roofed from end to end, save only for the raised niche over its westward front, the abbey church sat like a great hen on a nest well stocked with the relics of saints ; while far below these, no doubt, lay remnants of a still more ancient creed, and the bones of its once zealous servers, bound now doubly to death under the material and ghostly weight which a newer faith had imposed on them.

It was winter : a bell swung solemnly, thumping the frosty air with hard monotony of sound. Amid the dead whiteness of street and roof everything with a suspicion of warmth in its local colour stood forced into prominence. Even the pigeons perched disconsolately on the snow-crusted roof of the image-seller's abode seemed soiled by comparison. The streets were bobbing with life, every class wearing its holiday array, singing boys and acolytes on their way to serve Mass already had on their church finery. They snowballed each other as they ran ; but all their throwings broke into white powder, the frost-bitten snow would not hold.

Among the better dressed townsfolk, in their

bright cloth cloaks lined with fur, mixed ill-clad peasants who had come in for the great festival of their patron-saint. Most of these wore cloaks of a dark blue, with sometimes a rough fleece for extra tippet : others were clothed only in sheep-skins ; breeks of the same, rubbed to a bare shiny surface of leather, descended to knee or shin, between which and the rough strips of hide, thonged about the ankle, weather-beaten shanks showed like the gnarled limbs of trees. Sheep-skin bonnets covered most heads ; here and there under a brightly coloured kerchief went a man picked from his fellows : one or two of these had silver earrings ; they were the small herdsmen with freeholds, wealthy by comparison with the rest. From the outside districts the women were few and far between, since to go to church in those days was a great privilege ; so, if two could not go, the husband took it as his right.

That day, Damien, the young shepherd, came in alone. His foster-father, with whom he had hitherto come, was now beginning to be bed-ridden, for at forty a shepherd started to be an old man ; rain and frost fulfilling His word, put to the rack betimes those who had to set trust in the open clemency of God's seasonableness.

The solitary lad came with a special devotion at heart : he had in his hand a wax lamb ; to him it seemed the image of the one his foster-father had given him as a beginning of the flock which would presently be his only means of livelihood. He

was a younger son by charity only, and could not claim division along with the rest of the brethren when his father by adoption came to die. Already there was some jealousy of him in the home ; much therefore depended on the life and fruitfulness of the single ewe he had been allowed to pick out at the late lambing. The rough shape he carried represented to his simple intelligence all the good points a sheep ought to have ; there could be no mistake : St. Agnes had only to look to know what was meant.

When he entered the town, however, it struck him that his offering lacked festal completeness. A little bell round his lamb's neck would be the thing to fetch St. Agnes' heart. But all the shops and booths would be closed till High Mass was over, and he wanted to have his bell now.

The image-seller sat bunched at the bottom of her stairs ; her red cloak was tucked in under her feet, and drawn in a capacious hood over her face ; on the steps behind her many gay little images stood in tiers. Damien thought in that tawdry array it might be possible to find the thing he wanted.

" Have you any bells ? " he asked.

She recognized him as a shepherd by his dress.

" Sheep-bells ? No. My wares are for piety."

" That I saw," said Damien. " I want a little bell to go on this lamb's neck which I am offering to St. Agnes. Have you nothing that will do ? "

The woman looked up at him for the first time

with attention, and gave a short, dry laugh. He was a fairer youth than most shepherds, hardy and strong and in the bloom of manhood ; his bare lower limbs seemed not to feel the cold.

"Let me see!" said the image-seller, and, reaching, touched the hand that held the wax model and found it warm.

Damien gave the lamb into her keeping. She drew out a corner of her cloak and pulled off a small metal ornament that was stitched there. It was round, and hollow ; inside, a loose bead made a tinkling. "Will that do?" she inquired.

He nodded cheerfully, then more dubiously, asking to know the price.

"Come back after the festa," she answered, "and buy one of my images. They are quite cheap : this I will throw in." She unravelled a thread from her gown, and looped the bauble round the lamb's neck. Damien thought that St. Agnes would be hard to please, if not satisfied now.

The image-seller's manner caused him to look more curiously at her when he bent down finally to take the model out of her hands. Then he whistled softly. "I do not wonder," said he, "that you wear your hood so much over your face."

"Why?" she inquired, keeping her bright eyes in shadow.

"People would not see your images : they would only see you."

He took his lamb and went happily to the church. Pushing among the crowd, he made his way toward the shrine of the saint. There a priest received his offering ; he saw it hung up along with others, while below he set up two small candles in thanksgiving.

When Mass and the great procession that followed were over, he went back to finish his bargain with the image-seller. She and her wares had vanished. He supposed it would not be wrong to go and knock at her door, for he knew that she lived in the small half-ruined shrine that stood across the ramparts.

Bidden enter, he found the place thick with smoke that smelt sweet as incense. The image-seller was stooping over a brazen pan in which burned a faint flame. When she raised herself Damien saw that he had not overrated her beauty : it did not belong to face alone ; the hair which flowed almost to her feet enclosed a figure whose slightest movement would have cast enchantment over any man bred to the indulgence of his passions. But in Damien, though her beauty pleased him, it aroused no headstrong impulse : he stood gazing, smiling quietly to invite recognition and memory of the errand that had led him to intrude. "I suppose," said he, "when we were all at church you had no more trade, and tired of waiting. Now is a better time : you should make haste and fetch down your wares ; you would catch our country-folk then, as they pass out of the city."

"I have sold enough for to-day," answered the image-seller, smiling at the youth's simplicity of manner. "Sit here and rest. When did you last eat?"

Damien remembered a far-away morning meal, and felt famished. She set bread and wine before him. At the first mouthful it became apparent to him that he had never before tasted viands like these. He pushed away cup and platter. "I have no means," said he, "to give reckoning for such fare."

"But it is the festa," she replied; "all fare free to-day at least."

"This bread," said Damien, "was meant surely for the Abbot's high table! How do you come by it?"

"I come by many things without asking," the other answered; "knowledge also, Damien. Who is it that you love?"

The boy flushed, lost in wonder at the question. "I wish you could tell me!" he sighed.

A look of sheer amazement for a moment crossed the image-seller's face: this boy, who had looked at her without trembling or confusion, could remember still that he loved another! That one must be a veritable wonder, then!

"Damien," she said, "you are bewitched!"

"I think I am!" was his reply.

"Since when?" she asked him.

"Since last full moon. How do you know my name?"

"Did you not utter it yourself while you knelt at St. Agnes' altar, and forgot altogether Our Lady standing near?"

"Where were you, then? behind me?"

She nodded. "Go on with your story!" was all she said.

"Oh, well! but there's little to be told," replied the youth. "That night—at full moon, I mean—there was a white frost. Meaning to watch, I lay down in my cloak for warmth, and was asleep before I well knew. When I woke I saw quite plainly the bare feet of a woman beside me; my hand was by one of them—she was seated on the bank above: the moon showed her to me quite clearly. I took up my hand to rub my eyes; then she was gone! Yet the grass had still the marks of her two feet where the frost had thawed under them. That was all that remained." The youth sighed.

"Is it the two bare feet of a woman you love, then?" inquired the image-seller.

"I do," said Damien with a deep breath; "but more all that rest of her which I have not seen!"

"And what do you take her to be, then?"

"Either from the Devil, or one of the blessed saints," he whispered.

"In either case, so to love her is sin."

"I do not know," said the shepherd. "But to-night I shall know. It is St. Agnes' moon: I have prayed that she may enlighten me when the time comes."

"What? you think you will go?"

"Go? Why not?"

The image-seller laughed softly. "Damien, you are indeed bewitched!"

She brought to him a tray of small images, unlike what he had seen before; their draperies clung close to their limbs, and were of faint tints through which the clay of which they were moulded showed softly. The smooth grace of these forms gave them the air of having just stepped aside from some procession or dance which they were waiting to rejoin. One of these she gave to him, a figure wearing a gold circlet, and holding a dove in one hand. In the abbey church over the Lady Altar was just such another, only that one was much larger; it was a statue of high repute, for no one knew where it had come from, or how long it had been there: but there was no other statue of Our Lady like it in all the churches of Christendom, therefore it was held in the greater reverence.

"Here," said the image-seller, "is a true Madonna to watch over you; and for the rest let us trust that all to-night your lamb will be ringing its bell for you at St. Agnes' altar. Come now, what are you going to pay me?"

"This is all I have," said Damien, opening a lean pouch and showing a few bronze coins.

The image-seller smiled. "That is not enough," said she.

"Then," said Damien, "I must leave the

Madonna, and pay only for the bell that you sold me."

"The bell is worth many times more," answered the other.

"That little bell?"

"Ay! that little bell, Damien! The sound of that bell in St. Agnes' ears will bring thee, in days to come, more flocks than thou canst count: art thou backward to give me my price for it now?"

"If it is to bring me so much," replied the young shepherd, "let me pay my tithe when I am rich. That will profit you far better: for now I am poor."

The image-seller looked at him for a while with an air of mingled mirth and scorn, yet with some doubt. Then she said, smiling: "It is enough; if thou wilt come again, and of the first increase of thy flock bring me the best, it shall suffice. And thou shalt have the Madonna also, for thou art a simple youth, and witchcraft might find an easy way with thee. Swear by the fire upon this hearth, so mayst thou have a cold hearth and no friend in the world, if thou come not again to keep faith with me."

Damien said: "My oath shall be my own." But when he was about to utter the holy Name the image-seller's hand touched his, soft and warm; he faltered, and was dumb.

Soon after, with the little statue of the Madonna under his cloak, he set out upon his return journey,

only just in time, for as he passed through the gates the curfew clanged the signal for closing, since at that time of the year dusk set in early. Had he been a few minutes later Damien would have been shut into the city for the night ; he had forgotten under the image-seller's roof how fast time went.

That night he was out with the other shepherds awaiting his turn to keep watch.

The sheep were herded within the floor of an old Roman arena sunk in the side of a hill, whose grass-grown mounds and circling terraces told of its use in earlier days. Damien's watch not being due till toward dawn, he withdrew himself from his companions, and lying down in a retired place on one of the higher terraces, fell quickly into the heavy sleep which a life in the open brings.

His awakening came from no dream, no call from his companions or other apparent cause. Yet, fully roused, he was aware of clear high moonlight striking the frozen herbage on which he lay wrapped in his sheep-skin cloak ; but there also, so near him that he might have touched them, were two white feet set delicately to earth. Seated above on the terrace, he could discern dimly a woman's figure ; of her form, wrapped in a long grey cloak, only the feet showed. These were the same wonderful feet that he had seen under the last full moon, white and unstained as though not accustomed to tread earth.

Damien drew in his breath, fearing to stir even

the air that held that miracle lest, as before, with his motion the vision should vanish. A wonderful feeling of delight took possession of him. So long as he lay still this fairness was his, to contemplate, to gaze on with worship. Wonderful were the small joints and the delicate toe-tips of pure unsullied flesh. Oh, that he might lift his eyes and behold how fashioned was the face! Yet he feared the breaking of the spell too much to risk anything, save only to gaze and gaze.

The moon crept round the heavens till its light fell upon his face; then the movement of his lashes must have told their tale to the eyes looking down on him. A soft voice said: "Art thou awake, Damien?"

"Saint Agnes, even so!" replied the youth.

"Thou hast slept long," said the voice again.

"It seems longer that I have been awake," returned Damien. He looked again at those white feet that without shrinking rested upon the frozen ground, and feared to touch them lest he should find them too blissfully human for him to bear, and so break up the vision which now poured rest into his soul.

"Art thou indeed St. Agnes?" he said at last under his breath.

"What I am," the other answered, "thine own heart should tell thee. Is it peace with thee, Damien?"

"At this hour all is peace with me," answered the shepherd. "My thoughts are like a flock

stooping to drink by the still moonlit waters : I drink, but I have no thirst."

"Tell me," said the stranger, "of thy life. What art thou here ? "

"I am a shepherd," replied the youth simply. "Every night I do shepherding for my foster-father who is too frail now to go abroad."

"And how is the day spent ? "

"I do what there is to do. When there is no more to be done, I rest."

"And is the day all that thou livest for ? What shall this bring after it ? "

"In time, when my father is gone, I may be shepherd on my own account, for only two days back he gave me one lamb of my own choosing. The brethren were jealous ; they call me an interloper. Yet it is all I shall have when the old man dies ; and so to-day I made a pilgrimage to St. Agnes' shrine, and prayed her to watch my lamb for me and prosper it hereafter. If thou be St. Agnes, thou, I think, hast heard my prayer."

"Nay, I have heard naught," answered the stranger ; "but many nights I have seen thee when thou wast not with the other shepherds : and thou art not like them whose minds sleep while their eyes watch. Thou art a light sleeper, Damien ? "

"Nay, I sleep sound ; but a little sleep is enough for me."

"I have seen thee rise," said the other, "at the deep of night and cross the brook, and go

up to the hills alone, and there keep watch where no flocks were to be guarded."

Damien drew a deep breath: wonder for a while held him silent; then he said: "Where, then, wast thou?"

"So near that I could have touched thee," she answered. "For what wast thou waiting all those hours?"

"For thee," he replied, speaking as one in a dream; "surely for thee!"

"Now I am here," said she, "what wouldst thou?"

"I would have thee remain."

"If thou keep me in memory, I remain."

"But the memory gives disquiet to a man: only the eyes give rest."

"Give thy memory to me alone, and thou shalt not be disquieted."

The young shepherd lay silent for a while; then he said: "I have another memory of which I cannot get rid; it burns my heart." And, when she asked no question, he told her of the image-seller and the bargain he had made with her, also of how he had bound himself to return under penalty of a cold hearth and a lonely life.

"Better were a cold hearth and loneliness," replied the other, "than for thee to return and take bargains of her."

"But I owe her a debt," said Damien.

"Pay thy debt," replied the other, "but hold no further converse with her. Maybe, if she

have power to do her will against thee, thou wilt have a cold hearth and live unbefriended ; yet I will watch over thy young flock and prosper it. And he that loves God should have no fear of the wiles of evil. Hast thou any other wish to ask of me ? "

Damien, looking down with fixed eyes and breathing low, said : " I have one : yet now I fear to utter it."

" Nay, do not fear ! " she said.

" It is to kiss thy feet."

On the grass he saw the shadow of her hand pass over him as in blessing ; for a moment it rested lightly on his bowed head ; then it drew away and left him cold again. " Ah ! Damien, Damien ! " sighed her voice near him, " thou art still searching after me, and hast not found me." And as the words ended he saw no more the white feet resting upon the frozen herb, but footprints only, dark where the frost had melted under them. Once more he was alone.

Time went on, and all that Damien set his hand to prospered. At the first lambing after his ewe was full-grown she bore twins, the best and primest of the year. Damien's brothers looked at him enviously, grudging him his good fortune. As soon as the pair were weaned he picked out the better one, and carried it to the city to leave it at the image-seller's door, and so pay his debt according to his pledged word.

It was gay spring weather, almost turning to

summer, and the image-seller sat within the city gate on the steps that led up to the wall. She still wore her red cloak ; round her hair was a bronze fillet, and her white doves flew to and fro from sunlight to shadow over her head.

When she saw Damien come bringing the lamb (something else also he bore concealed), she laughed slyly. "I thought you had forgotten me," she said ; "I was wishing you a cold hearth."

"No, I had not forgotten," said the youth, setting the lamb down beside her. "Here is the payment that I promised." He stood straightening himself a little awkwardly under her scrutiny, and made as if to go on.

"Come in and rest," said the image-seller.

"No, I must return," he answered, "I have no time to stay."

"You mean that you have no will."

"That may be true also."

"Thy will is for her of the white feet," said the image-seller, in smooth tone. "Thou hast slept long, Damien."

At those words the youth stood lost in a tender trouble of amazement ; keen to his mind came the memory of the place where he had last heard them spoken, of the grassy hollow with its curving terraces blackened in moon-shadow.

The image-seller looked up at him from under the thick canopy of her hair, and smiled. "Did she let you kiss her feet, Damien ? Did she satisfy your hunger at last ? "

"When she was with me I was at peace," answered the youth. "What do *you* know of her?"

"Nay, what do *you* know? If you saw her face would you know it again?"

"When I have seen it I shall know that I have seen it," answered the youth solemnly.

The other shook a laughing face at him till her hair fell forward and covered it.

"Would you know her feet, Damien—those white feet?"

"Yes," said the youth, "I should know those."

"Were they like this, or this?"

The image-seller put out first one foot and then the other; she shook off her gay sandals and showed them bare: beautiful feet to look on, rose-white and spotless; wonderful were the small joints and the delicate toe-tips of pure unsullied flesh. Did the world contain more than one pair of feet such as these? And the image-seller said to him again: "Damien, were they like this?"

How could he deny what he remembered so well? How could he take his gaze from them? She watched him, and waited for her triumph that was sure to come.

Damien's tongue stumbled, and he spoke thick. "She was not like you," he said at last; and with his whole soul he blessed then the feet that had not allowed themselves to be kissed.

The image-seller drew back her feet and hid

them under her robe. She drew out a long bodkin from the heavy skeins of her gold hair and struck it all at once into the side of the small yeanling that lay beside her. So sure was the stroke that the lamb fell dead there and then. "Your hearth is cold, Damien!" she said. "Your hearth is cold."

Grief and resentment filled the young shepherd's heart as he saw the life he had so tenderly guarded and nourished thus wantonly destroyed. There was no more doubt in his mind now about that keepsake of hers which had so long troubled him. "This also," he said, "I bring and render you again, a gift for which I care not!" From the folds of his cloak he drew out the little ikon crowned with gold and bearing a dove in one hand. He let it go: it fell upon the pavement, breaking to a thousand fragments.

The image-seller leapt up with a sudden cry of fear and pain: one of the flying pieces had struck her on the foot, wounding the instep and causing the blood to flow. She wailed like a frightened child: she who had dealt callous death a moment ago, was frightened to see the flowing of her own blood.

Damien waited no longer, but strode on. He went into the church, and there stayed not at the Lady Altar, where also was a statue with a gold fillet about the brow and in one hand a dove: passing that by, he came to the shrine of St. Agnes. The saint stood with her mantle spread wide;

beneath it hung many votive offerings of the poor peasant folk whose flocks lay in her keeping. Damien saw there his own offering made a year and a half ago, the wax lamb with the little gold bell about its neck, and he prayed St. Agnes to have him and it in safe keeping, since it was now certain that his foster-father could not live much longer, and when he died Damien would have no home but such as he could make by his own earnings. When his prayer was ended, he lighted a small taper to his patron's honour, and turning to go, saw the image-seller standing behind a pillar watching him ; but without a sign of recognition he passed her and went out.

When he had gone she came, and finding no one near, for the church was all but empty at that hour, took one of the tall candles from off the Lady Altar, and set it upon St. Agnes' shrine higher than all the other candles there burning in a row. And the flame of it licked the feet of the little wax lamb which had about its neck the gold bell she had strung there. "Yours shall be a cold hearth, Damien !" she said as she turned to go.

Not long after Damien's foster-father died, and his sons divided the inheritance ; but Damien had only what his foster-father had given him during his life, and no land of his own. So he chose out the best piece of pasturage he could find on common ground, though that was poor enough, and started to be a shepherd on his own account.

Presently it became evident to all that Damien's flock prospered, while to the brothers fell nothing but ill-fortune. If they had small liking for him before, you may be sure they loved him now even less. Before the cold set in Damien built himself a rough hut, scarcely to be called a home, only just sufficient to give him shelter when winter was at its worst ; but one day, in the very depth of winter, the hut caught fire and was burned down. He built it up again, and again the same thing happened. Then one day he chanced to overhear one brother saying to another, " Damien has a cold hearth ! " and both laughed, as though they knew why.

As for Damien, he remembered the words of the image-seller ; so after that he set up a roof of hurdles covered over with turfs and lined with straw, only big enough for one to lie down and sleep in, and so poor that it was worth no man's while to destroy it. And so, being hardy, he spent his life in the open air, homeless and friendless, and yet in spite of poverty his herd increased and prospered more than those of his neighbours, while at the brethren's door stood black fortune.

This was not altogether a good thing for Damien. People began to crook their thumbs as he went by. One day as he passed through a village, a small child, to whom he offered a toy lamb he had carved out of wood, shook his head, saying : " No, you are a wizard : I must not take it ! "

Damien stood still and looked back the way

by which he had come ; and there he could see, in each doorway or window that he had passed, eyes furtively watching him, and ahead all the street stood empty. Then for the first time he felt that he had a cold hearth among his fellow-kind. He had not known it before : for by choice and circumstance he had led a silent and a solitary life, and had been slow to realize how the world looked askance at him.

That night as he lay out by his flock, with the sound of their quiet feeding in his ears, he heard one of his bell-wethers start up and begin to run. It was a pitch-black night ; even Damien, though well used to the darkness, could not see without the aid of a light. His lantern had gone out, so while he kindled it, he sent out his dog to head the runner back again. Of pursuer and pursued no sound came back at all. Far off, following their tracks, he came upon the bell-wether and sheep-dog lying dead side by side : nothing to explain how they had died. It seemed then that some invisible power of darkness was in league against him with those who had destroyed his home. His dog had been with him ever since as a boy he had folded his father's sheep : and now what good would the prosperity of his flock be to him if he were left with no single friend in the world ? He was to know then, at last, what a cold hearth meant, and how chill its ashes could be. Vigorous and hardy of limb, he had recked little through all the years of his life of hardship

and cold, but now the coldness of his fellow-men, the hatred and the cruelty, struck in and reached his heart.

In the dark and comfortless hours before dawn he prayed to St. Agnes to send him aid ; and when the first grey light of morning stole over the fields he heard the whimpering of a hound, and saw at his feet a deerhound that crouched and fawned, and looked at him with eyes that said, Master !

So had St. Agnes answered his prayer.

Soon the tale carried, even to the city, of the shepherd who had a deerhound for sheep-dog, and whose flock was so guarded, no harm could come to it. Some said that because he was a good man the saints showed favour to him : but more held that he was a wizard. So said the foster-brothers and all who listened to their story, for whenever they went into the city for buying or selling they told strange tales of him to the merchants, the wood-staplers and the tanners, and others with whom shepherds trade, so that presently Damien found that many of the merchants refused to buy from him ; and, though his fleeces were the finest in the whole district, he got the worst prices.

Before long, therefore, though his herd still increased, he began to feel the pinch of poverty. The townspeople looked black at him as he came and went through the city streets on fair-days and festivals ; a few even refused to sell to him, but

they were not so many as those who would not buy, nor did their refusal matter so much, for Damien had small means for making purchases of them now. But still he was patient and of good cheer, waiting for the Feast of St. Agnes to come round : surely then she would hear him and restore to him the charity of men's minds.

One day there came from the city news of a strange miracle wrought in the abbey church upon the Feast of the Conception of Our Blessed Lady. On that day, when High Mass was sung at her altar, where also stood the statue in her honour crowned with a gold fillet, and bearing in one hand a dove, and while all the people were joining in the great hymn in praise of her that is sung at that season, a sound of hurrying wings was heard ; and in through the open west door came a flight of doves speeding swiftly to the altar, where, with circling wings and soft cooing noises, they hung, so closely gathered above and on both sides of the statue that they made a white canopy over it, and the flutter of their wings blew out the hundred tapers that burned there in Our Lady's praise, for what need was there of such poor adjuncts to her honour ? Surely, said all those who, looking on, beheld that sight, surely their wings were far fairer than the finest wax, and their eyes and their beaks were like stars and tongues of fire.

Yet the doves that had been drawn thus miraculously to do homage to Our Lady on this day of

her pure conception in the flesh were no celestial visitants, save as their mission made them so, but were the same that lived under the roof of the image-seller's house which stood over the city gate, and had come with her that morning to do homage to the image of Our Lady, now and henceforth to be held in double reverence because of them. And because she owned them, the image-seller won great praise and fame ; and she sold the mere feathers that fell from them to the pious-minded and the miracle-lovers at far more than their weight in gold, and one or two of the doves she sold in pairs outright, at a great price, to convents and churches which wished to perpetuate in their midst so saintly a breed. So in a short while, from having been quite poor and unknown, she rose to be the richest and most considerable person in the whole town, and when she went to Mass the merchants of the city vied with each other as to which should carry her stool and which her hassock ; the Lord High Abbot himself offered her the asperges as she entered, the Provost spread out his cloak over her seat when she sat down ; and her beauty, when she put back the hood from her face, made men mad with frenzy and jealousy and delight.

So the saying went among the citizens that two miracles had taken place in their midst : one that had come and had gone, namely the visitation of doves to the Lady Altar, and one that had come and had stayed, the fairest miracle of beauty that

men had ever set eyes on. And from all the country far and wide, as men heard tell of the wonder of her beauty, they hastened to the city to gaze on it, for now daily she went through the streets with music and flowers strewn before her, and a procession of youths and maidens at her heels ; many called her "the Queen of Love," and no one had an ill word to say against her, for her doves that flew with her when she went abroad, those same which had done pious homage to the Lady Altar, were unmistakably a sign of the favour of Heaven.

Only Damien, when he heard who this wonderful beauty was, did not go with his fellows to look on. But at Christmas, which fell within the third week after the miracle, all Christians being bound to keep that feast, he must needs go in with the rest.

When he got there, the city was in high revelry; all the streets were thronged with people waiting for the procession which was soon to pass. It was no ordinary procession that had been devised, but one such as men had never seen the like of before. On a car decked and hung about with tapestries and gold, with precious stones and garlands of berries and leaves, of rare flowers and fruit which themselves seemed to have been found by a miracle, the statue of Our Lady was to be brought from its place upon the altar, and carried about through all the chief streets to receive there the joyful homage of the whole populace.

That day all who entered the city gates thought no longer of the cold, for all the fountains at the streets' corners flowed with wine, and men with leathern jerkins, with green wreaths round their waists and upon their heads, danced through the streets, carrying big casks of mead and wooden wine-cups, offering free drink to all : any man had but to stretch out a hand. Children also ran about in pig-skins with little curly tails, and they carried fruits and sweetmeats, puff-balls of scent, and mistletoe, small switches, rods and whips, and holly boughs, which for a dime any man could buy. The fruits and sweetmeats were for eating, the puff-balls for throwing, the mistletoe for kissing under, the holly for beating off rude kissers or rivals, and the switches, whips, and rods were for the backs of the oxen that were to draw Our Lady through the streets, so that every man might lend a hand to aid her in her progress to the four gates.

Never had such mad revelry at that time of year been prepared before. All the Masses had been said early to get them out of the way. Damien going from church to church found them all closed ; at not an altar, even in the Abbey itself, was there server or priest : he was too late. Outside, every one was waiting for the stroke of noon when the procession would begin.

He took up his stand in a corner of the great square, and saw the car come, drawn by its white oxen : folk went into the church to fetch out

the image of Our Lady which was already waiting for them, robed and veiled, and hung with bells and jewels.

Presently a great shout went up from the crowd : out of one of the houses that looked on to the square came the image-seller, with her train of youths and maidens ; music went before her, over her head a white canopy was borne. Men held their breath with wonder, for never before had they seen her look so beautiful or go so splendidly robed. Then, as they let breath go, they all pressed forward with one impulse to be nearer to the wondrous charm of her beauty. Some one thrust the butt-end of a staff at Damien's back : " Wizard ! " scoffed a rough voice, " have you come, too ? "

Other folk, hearing that, looked round. " Where is there a wizard ? " they exclaimed.

" He," said the man, pointing : " that shepherd fellow ! "

Damien smiled, and shook his head. He had heard the accusation so often before, that there was no sting left in it. In the market-place it might matter to his pocket ; in the country it left him a lonely man ; but here at the festival it was mere foolishness : how could it hurt him at all ?

" Have a care ! " cried another. " That fellow has an evil eye : he kills cattle ; sheep won't breed if he crosses the field they are in. A pest on him ! What brings him here mixing with

pious folk as if he were one of us? Have him out! Have him out!"

Other voices chimed in; they rose in an angry murmur; this way and that, elbows hustled him. "A wizard! a wizard!" The cry was caught up and echoed from all sides. Before long fists were shaken, one struck hard from behind; the striker drew back, and, under cover of those in front, bragged of his deed.

One bold coward makes many; to right and left men began striking, in a hurry to get a bad character out of their neighbourhood. "Fools!" cried Damien. He wheeled about, and where he saw the burliest of his assailants, struck back a single blow. Three men fell then; at that the crowd wavered, but was too thick to give him a free passage. Damien backed, fighting: pulled and pushed, he stumbled his way through the mob. Presently on one side the weight of surrounding numbers gave way, the crowd parted; suddenly he swung clear, and losing his balance fell across a white-sanded footway, catching in his fall at a soft substance of raiment.

There was a light jangle of small bells: a chain of jewels snapped at the strain of his weight. "Ox!" cried the image-seller, striking his prostrate body with her foot.

Looking down disdainfully, she pulled to disengage her robe from his involuntary clasp; then, as she recognized him, a smile of triumph lit up her face: malice found subtle expression. "Why

has this ox been let loose, thus to trample on peaceful folk ? " she inquired. " Is there no harness for him yonder as well ? "

At the door of the abbey church the bearers were even then lifting the adorned statue to the dais of the car drawn by the white oxen, and staying it with ropes to keep it fast. And, oh ! strange, the statue and the image-seller were to look on as one, dressed each in a like robe of heavenly blue, with the same gold bells and pomegranates at its hem, the same girdle, the same gold circlet on brow, and over the head of each white doves were flying, making a feathered glory in air. A whisper went through the crowd, of wonder and awe, for there was the fair miracle beheld again, and there was its echo or reflection in living flesh and blood, a likeness of the Madonna come to earth to live again in the midst of men. And what was she doing, she to whom all eyes turned, on whose will as their signal all men now waited ?

Pointing to Damien, she gave order to those that stood near. " Let this ox also be harnessed," she said, " and run his course with the rest in service of her to whom all do honour this day : else, left loose, he may do folk a mischief ! " And as those about made haste to do her bidding, she leaned forward and whispered in the youth's ear : " Oh, Damien of the cold hearth, do you repent now ? "

Damien returned no answer, but, looking her full in the eyes, with an upward movement of

the arm he started to make the sign of the Cross.

A bystander struck down his hand with a staff. "What, wizard, what! dare you threaten a blow to her, the Queen of our Feast?" cried he.

Damien's wrist hung bruised and bleeding, while they put over his neck a yoke of ropes, and harnessed him in the midst of the four white oxen. Then they bound his hands behind him to the end of the wagon-pole, and the procession started.

At the first note of the heralds, at the cry of the marshals for the way to be cleared, at the first step of the milk-white team on the sand-sprinkled way, a madness of joy seemed to take hold of the city from roof-top to base. Every house seemed to open its mouth and cry, men shouted till they fell down; from upper windows hung womenfolk with daily-decked cages, letting loose innumerable finches and sparrows and other kinds of birds: many of which, falling stupefied amid the fumes of the torches and incense and the powder of scent-balls that filled all the air, were trampled underfoot by the populace in their joy.

Boys dressed in short red smocks, with cherub-wings behind, ran by the side of the car and threw white mice with gilded tails among the crowd, causing the women to leap screaming into the young men's arms. From the house-tops old men who had gathered there to be safe from the press, leapt down to join in the revelry and were taken up dead. Strong men broke their ribs with shouting, women their hearts; hundreds died a merry death that

day, and were trampled out of recognition by their own kin.

In the midst of all this babel arose a cry, wondrous in its unison ; suddenly it sprang, without starting-point, from all the city at once : " Regina coeli, Venus, Venus, Verticordia ! Salve, Salve, Regina coeli et orbis ! " Every mouth took up the cry ; it ran like fire through the streets and over the roofs of the city. Damien alone, bending at the wagon-shaft, heard and took in the meaning of the words uttered by the senseless crowd, and knew that all about him raved a city possessed.

On either side of him the oxen, goaded by a thousand blows, went bleeding and groaning under the weight of the car, while overhead the statue swung jingling between its stay-ropes, and nodded this way and that to the plaudits of the mob. Damien, also, had shared with the beasts many stripes from the hands of those lining the way. Holly-boughs had beaten his face till he was almost blind ; whips and staves kept descending upon his back. " Faster ! faster ! " cried the crowd, whom nothing now seemed to satisfy, and " Venus, Venus ! " came the ever-repeated cry from near and far.

Before the car went the image-seller, borne on a litter and accompanied by all the chief men of the city, and the high Church dignitaries. The Abbot himself was there, second to none in his attendance on her fair person. Down from under her veil fell a lock of rippling bright hair ; it sprang and

beckoned, dangling like a bait of gold-fish before his greedy eyes. "Madonna!" he cried, with a jumping heart; and, catching the end of it, danced like David before the Ark.

The image-seller looked back, and over the Abbot's bobbing mitre caught sight of Damien bowing at the yoke, with the harried oxen plunging to right and left of him. At that sight she clapped her hands softly and laughed aloud. "Venus, Venus!" cried the following crowd, and a mist of worshipping incense-balls broke round her.

The procession had by this time left the main street and was come to one of the narrow ways that led under the walls to the city gate. To right and left the crowd stood on raised stone causeways between which the road descended. Here just ahead, where the way was steepest and narrowest, Damien caught sight of a curbstone or buttress projecting from wall to street. "Venus, Venus!" shouted the riotous-hearted crowd. Leaning over the barriers to right and left they stretched out their hands in a mad effort to touch some stray lock of hair or loop of veil from that wondrous head that bore down into their midst. "Venus!" they cried. The barriers cracked under their weight.

Damien prayed in his heart the prayer of Samson bound. Putting forth his whole strength in a last effort, he swung the wagon-pole, and pressed hard on the flank of the nearest of the oxen. The car was already quickening to the descent, suddenly it

swerved and plunged. Men ran and caught at the wheels to stay it : too late ! There followed a shock, a cry of horror from the crowd, a snapping of cords and axle-trees. High in the air the image of Our Lady swung about stiffly, all of a piece, a dead helpless weight in the flimsy encumbrance of its shimmering adornments. Sideways it leaned, leapt with the last jolt of the overthrown car, and was down, breaking into fifty fragments against the stone rampart that flanked the way. At the same moment the footpath barriers gave under the too heavy strain of those that leaned on them ; then all below became dust and darkness, round a hurling mass of humanity dead, or presently to die ; and the cry of " Venus ! " that had been the password of their rejoicings sank to rise no more.

That night the city numbered its dead, but the full tale of them was never told. The narrow way leading down to the gate is still called the pit of death in memory of those who perished there. Hundreds died where they fell, trampled like grapes in a vat amid the wreckage of the great pageant ; and the scent of their blood mingled with the scent of wine, and of the flowers and the incense that had strewn their way of doom. But Damien was not one of these.

At nightfall, when bearers came to carry away the bodies, they found yet alive the man whose deed of destruction had sent wail through all that city of joy. Word of his saving came to the Provost :

"The wizard," they told him, "still lives." And the Provost, who had escaped from the crush with a broken head, sent answer that he was still to live for a while that justice might be done. So till the next day and some days after, Damien was held in ward.

No form of trial was needed, when all the city cried aloud for his blood. But when Justice finds itself popular, it must needs put on its array and become a spectacle. Moreover, while there were hundreds who wished to bear witness against him and cry "We saw!" there was one yet missing whom many sought for but could not trace. The image-seller had gone utterly, disappeared, so it seemed, out of life; and she was not to be found among the dead: none had seen her since, at the moment when the statue fell, she had thrown up her arms with a loud cry, and fled wailing, with face covered and hands smiting desperately at her heart, from the carnage and horror of that end. Only her doves were still to be seen sitting disconsolately on the roof of her empty abode, refusing the food that other hands offered them.

In his prison cell Damien was put to the question concerning her more times than once, but he revealed nothing, nor did he deny that evil had come upon her through him. Nearly a month went by, and still he lay in ward, enduring all things with a quiet mind, and waiting peacefully for certain word of his doom. So at last his judges decreed that he was to be burned in the public

square at noon of the Feast of St. Agnes : for on that day all the country folk would be there, and many of them wished to see him burn, because of dead sheep and sick cattle on which he was supposed to have cast an evil eye. None doubted but that he was a wizard now.

So on the Eve of St. Agnes, Damien lay down in his cell to sleep for the last time. All within those walls was dark, for no moonlight fell as yet through the bars of his narrow window ; but within its worn and broken tenement his mind was clear and his soul was at peace ; and scarcely had he lain down on the cold floor of his prison than sleep came to him.

But in a while he was awakened, why he knew not, with a wish to pray ; a momentary darkness was upon his brain, and it was with a clouded vision that he saw in the dim uncertain light the bare feet of a woman standing beside him, and above one bending towards him with a veiled face wrapped in a long cloak.

"Damien, you have slept long," murmured a voice in his ear.

He heard, yet the words sent no thrill to his heart. "Short or long," answered the youth, "I have slept well. God be with you ! Who is it that speaks ? "

"Alas ! " said the other, "know you not her whom you have entreated so evilly ? You are a dead man, Damien : but I have power to give you life and to set you free. I alone can do this. Only

restore to me the power that you have taken from me, so that I may return and reign once more in the hearts of all. Worship me with your lips and in your heart, you, my slayer whom men seek now to slay, and I will make you a living man ! Yes, I, even I, who now weep and plead, can give you joy and riches and power, and the fairest bride in Christendom, if you will obey my word. Only bend down your lips, Damien, and kiss my feet."

It was true that she wept : her tears rained on him as she spoke : they fell upon the stone at her feet. "Damien," she sighed in a voice wonderfully sweet to the ear, "it is for you, not for myself, that I weep. Do you not know me, beloved ? I am Love, the desired of all men." Damien rose up to his knees : he meant only to pray, but no prayer would come. The scent of flowers and of strange perfumes floated across his brain, numbing it, folding it in a mist of dreams ; a sound of music rang in his ears ; voices and small bells ringing, feet that danced ; he felt the warmth of breath, of hands, of long floating hair, and he saw, as in a glass darkly, joy and riches and power only waiting to fulfil her word and a sign from him. What sign must he give ? Did he remember it aright ? Blindly he reached out his hand till it fell on the warmth of her breast, and thereon swiftly made the only sign that he knew, the sign of the Cross.

At her cry of bitter lamentation, all that soft vision of things passed from his brain ; he opened his eyes, and saw clearly by a thin streak of moon-

light now reaching slantwise into his prison chamber, the shrivelled deformity of her presence fall and become ghost-like, fugitive and dismembered like the figment of a dream.

He sank back to earth to resume the slumber she had disturbed. He closed his eyes, but opened them again, to watch the southern moonlight broaden over the floor where he lay. And now before he saw or heard his heart thrilled, and he knew that his last desire on earth was to be satisfied.

She did not come, she was already there : out of the silver light that had crossed the bars of his cell, her form became visible ; a sense of the open air, of field and cloud, lay about her loveliness amid the shadows of the prison house.

" Peace be with you ! " she said.

" Peace is," he answered, and lay like a child looking up into her face. After a while, he keeping silence, she spoke again.

" If thou hast any need, tell it me."

" I have none, since I have thee."

" I came to offer thee healing."

" I am healed."

" To give thee freedom."

" Thou hast given it me : I am free."

" Oh, Damien, hast thou, then, no further need of me at all ? " she asked, and in her tone was something of regret.

" I know not," he answered. " If I need anything more, teach it me : then I shall know."

Softly she bade him rise. He stood by her side waiting her next command.

"Why, thou art in chains!" she said. Stupidly he looked down as though not understanding.

"Ah, I did not know," he answered, "I did not know. It was a foolish thing to do."

"Why?" she asked.

"I could so easily break them. I am very strong."

"Can you indeed break them?" she said. "Try."

"Do you bid me do it?"

Her look gave assent. One by one he broke and laid the shackles aside.

She turned to the window with its thick bars. "Can you break these also?" she asked him. He stood in the full moonlight, and looking out could see the sleeping city where not a light now showed, and before him in the square the stake already set up and the faggots prepared for the morrow. He drew out the bars one by one, and laid them on the ground.

"Now," she said, "you are free."

He repeated her word: it sounded like an old saying on his lips. He dropped his head wearily on the sill against which he leaned.

"May I sleep now?" he inquired. "Surely no one else is awake."

"Damien," she said, "beyond these walls and beyond the city gates lies a free world; and to-morrow the sun will rise over the white frosted

fields, and strike its warmth into the frozen herbs so that they become tender again for the flocks to eat ; and the faint mists will draw away, and range upon range of far-off hills become clear, and down the slopes will run a noise of falling waters, and the sheep-bells will sound through the valleys as the flocks move to fresh morning pasture ; and here and there a dog will bark and a shepherd call."

She ceased speaking, and waited.

" Yes," said Damien, " it is a good world."

" Only you will not be there."

" No," answered the youth, " but all will go on just as well without me to see to it."

With that answer it seemed that he satisfied her.

" Ah ! " she said, and there was now no shadow of regret in her tone, " it is true that thou hast no further need of me, Damien. Lie down, lie down and rest."

Already his eyes were shut, so he did not see her draw near : did not know till her lips rested upon his forehead. She breathed softly upon his eyes. " Therefore," she said, " since thou hast no longer any need of me, I give my gift and go."

Damien opened his eyes again : he was alone. But now he saw no more mere outward things, but only the vision that filled his brain, a vision of green pastures and still waters and flocks innumerable ; and with the sight the memory of old familiar sounds came back to him, the call of the farmstead, the cry of sheep and cattle and men, and all the murmurs from far and near which, better than

silence itself, bring to the ear that hearkens the sense and the inward meaning of peace.

Thereafter his name passes into the legend of that miracle which was done in the eyes of all. On the day appointed for his death, they came and found him unchained and free, and thought him but a witless fool, who in a frenzy of madness had broken his bonds and yet put to no profit the freedom he had won. And because the people still cried out for him to be burned, they led him to the stake and there bound him, and when all was ready set fire to the faggots.

Then befell that miracle, which none who remember the martyrdom of St. Agnes could doubt to be anything but a direct sign from Heaven. For scarcely had the flames, eager and fresh for their work, mounted high enough to throw light on the victim's face, when from the clearness above, like a white mantle cast suddenly to earth, came snow. With the soft rushing sound of wings it slid to fulfil the will which sent it, and beneath it, brief as a breath, sank the fire which had been kindled for carrying out the sentence of the law.

Beholding that marvel the people fell upon their knees. Those who had shouted "Wizard!" now held their peace and trembled. "He is a saint and we are all sinners!" they cried. Men ran and pulled back the faggots, eager to be the first to unloose the cords that bound him to the stake. Damien stood released of all the bonds in which he had been held captive: he was free now to go

where he would. But when men spoke to him he understood no word : though he lived, it was in a world separate from sight or sense. A great awe fell on the crowd, as they watched him go in silence through their midst, and out of the great square. First he went to St. Agnes' Altar, and there prayed a short while, then to the Lady Altar, where no image now stood. And after that he passed out of the town, no man preventing him, and returned to the pastures in which all his life had been spent ; nor did he again enter the gates of the city he had saved from so great a peril.

For many years afterwards he was to be seen, a wanderer through the countryside and the villages, bearing a shepherd's crook and with a deerhound at his side ; but his flocks no man saw. At the farmsteads and cottages he would stop to claim food or a night's lodging, and wherever he went he was welcome. Some said that he brought them luck, but others were merely glad to have him in their midst ; and there was great sorrow, not unmixed with a certain awe, when upon one cold January night he was found lying dead in the snow, with his deerhound dead beside him : an old man then, but still with a face of youth.

The Tree of Guile

SHADOWS of leaves fell through the windows of the Priory into the monks' cells : soft-textured leaves of the early summer with the sun in them. A green tint shed itself through the warm veins, and fell where the shadows danced on the monks' missals, between the eyes of the holy men, and the holy words.

The novices saw in them the limbs and the wings of the wood-folk, and crossing themselves for fear, drew back into the darker corner of their cells, leaving the sun to make a square of light on the stone floor for the tree-dancers to dance in.

But the Father Prior smiled, and letting his mind go dreaming over the holy legends of saints,—" God is good," he said to himself, " and maketh the thoughts of all that turn to Him pure."

Presently the bell rang at the outer gate, and the porter, entering the Prior's cell, said : " It is your son, Father, who is come and would speak with you."

Then the old man rose, and went in haste to the chapel, and to the figure of our Lord which was there : and he knelt, saying : " Sweet Father Christ, that bell that sounded to Thee but now, was for the coming of Thy prodigal son, Absalom, who has been gone from Thee now a year. Give me leave, therefore, to bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ; and let us make merry and be glad, seeing that the young man is yet alive ! "

Then he went forth from there, and came to the wicket ; and there looking through saw his son, a most fair youth passing into man's estate, and all his head was heavy with golden hair that flowed far and wide upon his shoulders.

The Prior put his hands through the wicket, and caught hold of the lad's face on both sides, and drew it within the lintel of the door. Then he kissed him right tenderly, asking him how he did.

" I do ill, father," answered the youth.

" Nay, I know, I know ! " said the Prior. " Easter is now passed, and thou didst not come to receive Christ's Body to thy poor famishing soul. Our Lord was sorrowful in His feast for this."

" Father," said the young man, " make peace with Him for me, and receive my confession ! I saw Him in the city, at the Church of the Assumption, last night ; and all through the procession, His Eyes were upon me like coals of fire. Then I knew that I had grieved thee, whom He loves, and I came to seek thy blessing ; but I would not enter till thou camest to bid me welcome."

" Enter without fear," answered the Prior ; " even now He waits for thee in the chapel." And he undid the bars, and drew his son across the threshold. Then the Prior went in, and sat himself down below the choir ; and the young man came and knelt with his face between his father's knees : " Give me your blessing," said he, " for I have sinned ! " The Prior said to him : " Tell all, see that thou hide nothing ! " The young

THE TREE OF GUILE

man answered : " Father, my sin is, I cannot see God."

" Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God ! " said the Father. " Thou art not pure."

" How can I be pure, when I am young ? "

" Christ was young," said the Prior, " yet He was pure."

" He had a pure mother ! " answered the youth, and the old man sighed.

After a while, seeing how his son kept silent, he went on : " When thou art tempted to sin, then within thy heart say : ' Thou God seest me.' "

" That," said the youth, " angers me ; since *I* cannot see God. In the darkness He looks at me with an evil Eye. If I loved Him as I love thee, it would not hurt me : I should not feel Him ever like a horn in my back. Nay, father, until I love God I am certain to sin. Thou hast learned to love God, and hast no sin and no temptation ; yet in the past *I* was thy sin ; and now I bear all the temptation."

His father said : " Stay with me and the brethren, this one night, while I hear what the Lord would say concerning thee ; and to-morrow I will let thee go. Only to-night be a little sorry for thy sins."

So that evening all the monks made merry because the son of their Prior was come to be their guest. They lighted a hundred candles before the rood, in thanksgiving to the five Wounds of Christ that bled once for all sinners.

At midnight, when all slept, the Prior knelt

alone before the altar ; and said he : " Sweet Father Christ, open the young man's eyes that he may see, and visit not on him the offences of his parents ! Nay, Jesu, Who lovest both who were the cause of him, Who has given peace unto her, and hast done away my iniquity, give me now to suffer temptation in the stead of my son. I ask no better than for a year to let this be, until Easter be come ; when he, being for so long a time untempted shall be made pure in heart and see God, as I also, by the ruth that Thou hast towards me, do see Him continually."

In the morning he said to his son : " Take God with thee, and go ; only promise me one thing, that until thou be tempted thou wilt commit no sin. And at Easter come again and receive thy Maker, and see if it be not well with thee ! "

So the young man gave that promise, and his father him absolution of all that had gone heretofore. Then he received his Saviour, and departed again to the city.

Presently the Prior, who had led so quiet and holy a life all these many years, became greatly moved to sin ; and for all the penances he might do never did the pain abate. Day and night his flesh strove with him, seeking to cast him out of the sight of God.

Daily, showing his sorrow before the Cross, he said : " Thou seest, Father Christ, how sorely Thy son has been tried in these years ; and how, not knowing Thee, he must needs go astray, and how

there was no help for him since he had not Thee. Nay, did I not wear Thy Cross constantly before mine eyes, and Thy grievous great wounds in my body, I could not keep from falling ! "

Every day he read continually of Christ's charity to sinners, also of the ways of grace for the healing of the seven deadly sins ; yet each day and night temptations of body and soul returned to him, as though in no way had he vanquished them previously.

Yet when the love of God seemed momently to fail him, the love of his son bore him in its stead ; and he would weep tenderly for the young man's past sorrows, saying : " Alas, my son Absalom, is it thus thou hast been afflicted ? "

Now all the monks wondered greatly how age and sorrow every day wrought such change in the Prior's aspect ; yet therewith the sweetness of his nature increased, so that it seemed his face shone when he spoke to them.

In the season of Lent, when spring was in the air, his trouble was so great that barely could he rise up off his knees lest sin should get the better hand of him, and throw him from grace. But at the time of our Lord's Passion he was cheered greatly, for word came to him from his son, saying that in all things he had kept to the letter of his promise, and been without sin such as he could name ; and that at Easter he purposed coming to receive his Lord, if might be, there, or, if not, in some other place ; trusting that after that

his eyes might be opened and he might see God.

Now on the Friday before Easter, which is the day of our Lord's death, the Prior knelt before the Cross praying, because of the heavy burden of sin that was upon him for his son's sake ; and cried he, stretching up his hands : " Rue on me, Jesu, for Thy five wounds, and for Thy piteous agony, endured for our sorrows ! " And as he spoke he felt as it were fire striking upon his hands and side, and also upon his feet ; and looking he beheld that he had received the signs of our Lord's Passion, even as our blessed Father Francis did at one time.

Then he said in himself, " Surely this is a token of my son's deliverance from sin, and that my offering is acceptable." And he blessed God exceedingly, far more for His mercy than for the miracle done in his own body. And being of an humble mind he let none of the brethren know of the honour Christ had done to him ; but, when any were by, covered his hands and feet that the marks might not be seen.

So the time passed of that and the next day, till it was the night before Easter ; and while he knelt watching by our Lord's tomb for the coming of the angels at dawn to roll off the stone, he was aware that his former peace of mind had returned to him, and that his burden of temptations was loosed. Howbeit not on that Easter day, nor in the week following did his son come to ring at the monastery gate.

Yet, in truth, the night before, the young man

had come, after a long journey, within sight of the Priory : and all the year past he had been sinless for anything he could think or name, having had no temptation. And as he went he wondered at himself, for his heart was pure, yet he could not see God.

And now he was come close to the ascent which mounts up to the walls of the Priory : just there below the orchards begins a glade, leading out of the high road, where many hawthorns and other trees are. It was the hour between late and early when night is about to cease, and dawn has not yet begun : doubtless in Rome, whence all things in Christ's Church have their source, the Easter sun had already risen.

Now as he came under that glade, the young man felt all the peace that had been there pass out of his heart ; for that was the same moment when the Prior's burden, that he had borne so long, was loosed from him, at the fulfilment of the time in which he had prayed that for his son's sake he might suffer.

To the left side, a little away from the track, stood a tree in young green leaf, and up among the boughs sat a woman, as naked as the Devil can make her ; and her flesh was all polished and smooth. Amongst the dull wood-shadows, liquid and mellow a light played round her, and the tree crackled at its roots, as though they were thrust through the earth into some underground fire to draw sustenance from thence.

That fair young Absalom, who for a year had had no temptation to try him either for good or ill, or to mix strength with his weakness, was as a bird to her lure. When he came where she sat above, she but reached down her hand and wound it in all his yellow hair, and drew him up to her into the tree. "We will make merry blossom together!" said she, and laid her wicked body by his in the heart of the boughs.

Easter passed, and no news was brought to the Prior of his son; and again the young summer came over the earth, and threw the dance of its leaves through the windows of the Priory, and on to the pages of the monks' books where they sat and read.

The Prior took a fair missal in his hand—all its borders were coloured with fine workmanship—and went out through the orchards and down into the glade beyond, reading as he went. Sorrow at the long absence of his son made him turn ever to the wounds of Christ, asking help of them for the absent one. Also he read the ways by which grace is to heal sinners of the seven deadly sins. Thus he went under the bright waving branches, seeing the shadows of their leaves pass between him and the holy words.

Presently, being weary, he sat himself down under one tree, musing of the words he read. Down hung long golden chains of blossom here and there, everywhere over his head. As he held the book open a whole shower of them fell, covering the last

page he had read. He lifted his hand to turn to the next meditation, and as he brushed the blossoms by he saw that all the page was wiped clear of writing, not a line there remained : all the holy words relating to the first of the deadly sins, and how it might be guarded against, were blotted out, and only the fair white parchment remained.

In a dream he turned to the next passage ; and again the golden blossoms unchained themselves from the tree, and fell, hiding out every word, and when he swept them away, all the words were gone.

" What miracle is this that God does ? " thought the Prior, and he turned again with hands that wore faint the marks of our Lord's Passion. Once more blossoms fell over the page that he had opened ; and when he cast them off, the words they had covered were wiped away.

At last he turned to where the sins of pride and presumption are told of, and their danger to men's souls, and the remedy through meekness to the will of Christ. And now, trembling, the Prior cast loose the blossoms that fell, and saw that of all the words which were wiped out only a few remained as before. There alone upon the page were to be seen these words of the scripture :

" And no man may redeem his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him ; for it cost more to redeem their souls, so that he must let that alone for ever."

And thereupon the tree crackled, as though its roots below were on fire. Truly in that moment

the Prior knew that God's doing was about to be revealed to him. He lay with his head leaned back, so that his ear was to the trunk of the tree, and within there he heard sobbing and crying, and his son's voice calling to him out of the pains of hell.

There, by compulsion of the father of lies, it spake thus unto him : " Ah, Father, how blind thou wast in the innocence of thy heart, loving God, not knowing Him ! Wherefore didst thou take on thee my temptations and not my sins : for before I was conceived those sins, which thou didst not, were ordained to be done. So, in a single night I did them all, and passed for ever from life to the bondage of hell."

When the Prior heard his son's voice speak that, with anguish of heart he believed it, and lay for a great while as one dead. Then he lifted himself up and cried : " Now I, that have been pure of heart, have seen God face to face ! "

He stretched up his hands in an agony of love, crying : " Cursed be God ; cursed be His Holy Name ! " And at that, for pure sorrow of the words, his heart broke, and all Christ's wounds that were upon his body fell to bleeding.

And as he lay so bleeding to death, his blood fell upon the tree's roots, and ran down into the earth. Then the whole tree cracked and was torn as if the lightnings of God had smitten it, and all its chains of fire withered and died and fell down, so that it was left bare. And the tree-witch loosed

from the body the soul of the fair young Absalom whom she had held there bound : so was that ante-chamber to hell made void and desolate for ever.

After a time came the Brethren, and found their Prior lying dead, with the marks on his body of our Lord's Passion. Then they, knowing him to be a Saint, bore him up to the Priory, and buried him in the chapel under the high altar ; and there, for such as loved God, were many miracles done in pity of him whose heart broke at cursing the Holy Name, and in token of the forgiveness that all love wins.

Inside-Out

THE STORY OF BUNDER-RUNDER, THE JAILBIRD

BUNDER-RUNDER was in jail. He was there for having talked too much, for saying things which the owners of the jail did not at all like, and which those who did not own the jail liked only too well.

The people of the country did not own the jail ; that you must quite understand. It was owned by those of another country ; the natives only paid for it. That was Bunder-Runder's complaint, or one of them. He did not yet know how good it was for a people not to own jails at all, and how much better it was to be in a jail than to own one. Would he ever find that out, do you think ? What can a jail teach one ?

In this jail Bunder-Runder was to remain for ten years. He was a young man, strong, rather beautiful. Women loved to look at him. They laughed when they saw him put forth his strength easily to do them a service ; they laughed more when they put their children into his arms for him to play with. He had not yet any children of his own. That was soon to have been—love, marriage, and home. The vision he had long had of them was then to become a dear, kind, foolish reality, a little world of his own to shape and cherish and make grow, sweeter and more beautiful than all the bigger world around him. But now, no. That

little world, on the making of which his mind had been bent, had fallen from his hand, shattered.

Ten years !

" When I come out," Bunder-Runder said to himself, " I shall be old. Every one will have forgotten me. It will be like another world ; my thoughts will not have gone into it, or anything I have done ; I shall not belong to it. I shall be old, but I shall have made nothing." And as he thought thus, his very blood seemed to be weeping—the warm, swift blood which ran strenuously through him, touching as with tears the heart and head and feet and hands, which henceforth were to be useless.

Every time he began thinking, grief took hold of his thoughts and drew them to the same end.

" I am shut up in walls," he cried. " It were better that I were dead." Just as his blood went weeping through his body, so through his brain his thoughts went weeping from place to place ; round and round wearily they went, beating a high road for grief to travel by.

After he had been in prison for a while, food was brought to him, and he ate ; but he did not know why he ate.

" I am eating only to become old," he said to himself. " What good is that to me ? " He left off eating.

But presently he grew so hungry that food seemed good to him again, and time not so long or so vain

a thing as dying without having learned all that there was to learn.

So when food was again brought to him he ate, sitting to it in seemly fashion, with thoughts turned aside from grief for a while to the strange beauty and brotherhood of things which grew and were serviceable to man.

Then his mind went out to the rice-fields, green and waving and changing colour towards ripeness from day to day ; changing, too, as the light fell on them, morning or evening, from east or west ; and at night, under moon and stars, more wonderfully changed still, and always different, yet always inwardly the same.

But as soon as he had finished eating, his thoughts came back to him with a shock, and he remembered that he was a prisoner.

" I shall see the rice-fields shining no more," he said, " till I am old. Then they will have ceased to shine, for then with my old eyes I shall no longer see them." And turning his face to the wall, he wept. It was always the same wall his thoughts came back to.

The same wall ! How long had that wall been there ? How had it come ? Who were the men that had built it ? He began to look at and to examine it. It was strong, but it was not very old ; not so old, he thought, as his own father. Yet it seemed older, for already within its narrow space many young lives had pined and faded and grown old waiting for freedom.

Then, as he bethought him, he knew how it had come, and what men had had the building of it. They were his own brothers, his countrymen ; and they, not gladly or willingly, but being ordered to it and for payment, had built this wall to be a prison for themselves and others. They had drawn clay from the beds of dried rivers, they had made bricks, they had hewn stone and timber, they had mixed plaster and mortar, they had reared up beam and roof, cutting off light and air from the space below, dividing it into cells ; and now into this space below he, their brother, had come to be kept, wasted and useless, to bury bit by bit, one day at a time, with nothing of change to make one seem different from another, the ten most beautiful years of his life, with all their gladness taken out of them.

" Oh, Brothers, why have you done this to me ? " he cried.

And suddenly his own thoughts answered for them :

" Because we could not help ourselves ; because we are all broken parts of that which was meant to be one whole. All over the world men are building walls, dividing themselves each from each, through ignorance and cruelty and fear. Because they don't know, that is why people are afraid of one another ; and being afraid, they become cruel. That is why they build walls, not here only. All over the world it is the same—walls, walls. As walls grow rotten and old, as long as fear lasts

they will make us build others in place of them."

Bunder-Runder laid his hand on his prison-wall; he felt the strength and the depth of it, how well it was built, what a lot of brick and stone lay there, imprisoned like himself, but for much longer a time. Of that imprisonment not ten or twenty or fifty years would see the end.

"Brothers," said Bunder-Runder, "I am sorry for you. For your setting free is further away than mine; before you even begin to be old I shall be dead. Old age is good, is it not? But it is so far away."

Thus to his prison-wall he spoke, pitying it.

Suddenly he had a thought: it stood up and looked at him. It seemed to be standing only on one foot, on the very point of a toe, as if to show, even without motion, how light and quick and alert it could be. Then it seemed as though it lifted a hand and beckoned to him.

"Let us go out!" it said.

"How can one go out through this wall?" said Bunder-Runder. "We are in prison."

"There is no wall that *I* cannot get through," said his thought. It gave a flick of its foot, and was gone.

A moment later, and it was back again.

"Outside there is sunshine," it said.

"Yes," said Bunder-Runder, very attentive.

"There has been rain," his thought went on. "The wells are all full, the streams are running down from the hills; the frogs are singing in the

marshes, and the rice-fields are beginning to look green."

"I know," said Bunder-Runder.

Other thoughts began cropping up thick and fast; in and out they went. It was quite true that there was no wall they could not get through.

They began to crowd in on him. Bunder-Runder let them come and go again just as they liked. He made them all welcome. If they wished to stay, they stayed; if they wished to go, they went.

Bunder-Runder sat in a sort of dream.

"This wall is wearing thin," he said to himself and laughed, while quicker and quicker his thoughts went in and out.

Presently he began singing. First he began imitating the song of the frogs, then of the birds. Hearing so much noise going on within, one of the jailers looked in on him. But Bunder-Runder was outside, and did not see him; Bunder-Runder was up in the hills. He had climbed quite high; he was looking down on the plain; he could see all the streams shining a way through the grain-fields; he could see men driving bullocks along the road; he could hear them call as they passed to other men working in the fields; he could hear——

"Hi, you!" cried his jailer for the third time. "Not so much noise in there!"

Bunder-Runder came back with a bound, and sat cross-legged, smiling up at the eye which looked in on him through the hole in the door.

" High and mighty and merciful, I beg pardon," said Bunder-Runder respectfully ; " I forgot myself ; I did not remember where I was. It is a beautiful day, is it not ? "

The jailer grunted and withdrew, and Bunder-Runder was off again. He came back to his cell to sleep, quite tired, but most wonderfully refreshed. Truly, as he had said, it had been a beautiful day.

After that the days grew more and more beautiful. In and out went his thoughts ; they never left him alone. He was always forgetting himself, and sang without knowing it.

His jailer reported him to the governor.

" Bunder-Runder," he said, " is always making more noise than he has any right to. From the way he sings, Sahib, you would think he was at a festival or at a wedding or at a rich uncle's funeral. I can't cure him of it ; I've left him without light and I've left him without food, and still he goes on. It's not reasonable unless he is planning some way by which to escape."

The governor seemed to think as the jailer did ; he caused Bunder-Runder to be brought before him, and examined him up and down, and could discover nothing. He caused his cell to be searched, and, to make doubly sure, had him transferred to another. But despite it all, the singing of Bunder-Runder went on, and some days it was as though he were burying not one rich uncle, but ten.

In a way, that is what Bunder-Runder was doing. He was burying one after another all the injuries

that life had done him in the days when he was at liberty, and from the grave of every injury and injustice that he buried a little kindness sprang up to life and came to keep him company. Bunder-Runder's cell became full of these little kindnesses. They sat round him and under him, they leaned over him, they laughed and jested, pushing him this way and that. Every morning when he woke they pushed him into the open. He left his cell behind, passing through the thin walls, and followed their leading away over the shining plains and into the lives of people he knew and of others he had never known, and of others still who had not yet been born.

He began to make a poem about them all in his own head ; he must not write it down. That occupied him ; day by day it grew larger, filling his mind. He sat very silent ; his jailer no more complained of him.

"His spirit is properly broken," said he to the governor ; "he has become good." And the governor gave him a good-conduct mark.

In the course of three years Bunder-Runder earned a lot of good-conduct marks, but he did not know of it. The poem was nearly finished ; that was all he cared about.

It was a very beautiful poem, all about children —children of tender years, children in the spring of youth, in the full strength of manhood, and in the decline of age ; for he had found out that secret which keeps alive the common child in us all.

When the governor of the prison came and spoke to him, Bunder-Runder heard him—under his beard and inside that fat, red face of his—babbling like a child ; and putting it into his poem as soon as the governor's back was turned, he swung his head this way and that and laughed: for the babbling of the governor's voice was as sweet to him as the sound of a brook that runs down to empty itself into the great river and into the sea. It wanted only that : the poem was done.

Out in the world everything had begun to spring ; flowers, and the young green fields of rice, and music in the living heart ; and from every tree, a little shaken by the wind, came fragrance to catch the breath, and a twinkle of leaves to make delight to the eye. Bunder-Runder was there in the midst of it all ; oh, yes, he was there. His poem was finished now, and he stood on the ridge of hills looking out over the villages of the plains, and in every village, he knew, festival was going on, and people were rejoicing, perhaps not knowing why. But he knew that it was because the eternal child in Nature was looking once more into men's eyes as unspoiled as ever, as clear and shining and pure as in the days of old. For hundreds and thousands of years wrong and cruelty had been trying to possess and cover the earth ; but it had failed, and Nature was as much a child as she had ever been.

Bunder-Runder, with his finished poem in his heart, followed his thoughts from village to village ; and everywhere he went he found a home waiting

for him. He had not to speak : the meaning of his poem was in his face ; people came and looked at him, then ran to tell others, and word of him went before. Everywhere he went that day whole villages came out to meet him. The children and the young women threw garlands upon him as he passed. He became a wagon of flowers ; a wonderful scent filled his brain ; he ceased to see the faces that thronged about him or hear the voices of the people. Forward and forward he moved till he came to a deep sleep.

In the evening, just before sunset, the jailer opened the door of Bunder-Runder's cell. He looked in ; then, without looking again, he ran fast, fast to fetch the governor. He was almost too frightened to speak ; but what he did say was enough to make the governor understand that the prison rules were being broken. So the governor put on an angry countenance and came with him to the door of Bunder-Runder's cell.

Inside sat Bunder-Runder very still, his legs crossed, his hands resting upon his feet, and all about him hung garlands of flowers, breathing incense very strange. The cell was full of their fragrance.

" Number 109," said the governor, " where did you get those flowers ? "

Bunder-Runder did not answer.

" Go and give him a shake," said the governor. " He is asleep."

" Sahib, I dare not," replied the jailer.

So the governor went and did it himself. At the governor's touch Bunder-Runder bowed softly forward, his face to the ground ; and suddenly all the garlands of flowers that were upon him faded away, leaving only their fragrance behind.

The governor turned and ran out of the cell, for he too was afraid. Bunder-Runder was just as harmless now that he was dead as ever he had been in life, and yet the governor was afraid. That is often the way. People are afraid of things they do not understand.

The cell where Bunder-Runder lived those three years making his poem has been many times washed and disinfected ; but there is still something the matter with it, and it is almost useless, for when a prisoner is put into it he sings.


J C